

Educating children and young people on the UNCRC: Actions, avoidance and awakenings

Summary

Article 42 of the CRC asserts 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'. Yet since the ratification of the CRC in 1989, the CRC is not widely known to children and adults. Public discourses of children and childhood are considered as key hindrances to widespread promotion of the CRC. Significant actions that have taken place since 1989 to promote the CRC internationally and nationally are mapped, noting gaps, missed opportunities and possible explanations for neglect in the promotion of the CRC. To move forward in honouring children's rights through the CRC being widely known, possible awakenings in practice and policy are proposed.

Following, the horrifying scale of human rights violation of WWII, the United Nations formulated the Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (United Nations General Assembly, 1948) based on the hope that awareness and practice of human rights would prevent the world suffering another holocaust (Gerber, 2013). The writers of the international legal instrument specifically saw education as the key vehicle to cultivate awareness and practice of human rights, as stated in Article 26:

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. (United Nations General Assembly, 1948)

However, after more than sixty-five years of mandating and promoting human rights education (HRE) in the UDHR, international studies such as Gerber's (2008) study of schools in Melbourne, Australia and Boston, USA, and Lapayese's (2005) survey of HRE in secondary schools in Japan, Austria and the USA highlight that the implementation of HRE has been small and localised or that, if embedded at policy level, the implementation in classrooms is limited and weak.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) further enhanced the project for human rights-based education through promoting four key principles to a rights-based approach: 'non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the optimum development of the child, and the right to express views' (UNICEF/UNESCO, 2007, p. 44). Article 42 of the CRC seeks to ensure that the Convention is public knowledge by declaring: 'States Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike'.

Educated adults can readily access the Convention and many courses in law, education, policy and social welfare address the Convention. Yet, children's knowledge of their rights remains a largely unaddressed component of the Convention. For the enactment of rights, people need to know their rights, so they can deservedly claim their rights. A child cannot be a rights holder if they know not what rights they hold. Learning about rights builds intrinsic sense of self-value and self-esteem (Feinberg, 1973). Children need to see themselves having value not for any particular characteristics but purely for their existence. This chapter thereby explores the fulfilment of Article 42 since the ratification of the CRC in 1989 as an endeavor for the human rights education project.

Human rights are intergenerational, yet as Freeman (1994) attests, 'there can be no doubt that children are among the most vulnerable and powerless members of our societies today' (p. 307). Children are one of the last groups to claim rights, yet, unlike other marginalized groups, it is largely others (child advocates) claiming on children's behalf. The first step is for children to know their rights. Signatories to the Convention on the Rights of the Child are obligated to publicly promote the CRC. The Committee on the Rights of the Child requires signatory states to report on actions to address children's rights education in the first two years of becoming a signatory, then every five years from then on (Child Rights Connect, n.d.). Unfortunately, even with the international imperatives of the UDHR, CRC and regular reporting mechanisms, not all children know their

rights, and I would even confidently suggest that the number of children who know their rights is minimal. Like McGowan (2012), I justify children's knowledge of their rights for both status-based and instrumental justifications. Each child's inherent dignity informs the status-based reason. Knowing, understanding and enacting children's rights provides the instrumental reasons that produce positive consequences, such as children feeling valued and in turn flourishing, causing intergenerational civic engagement to prosper.

To understand influences on the promotion of CRC to children, dominant conceptualisations of social constructs of children and childhood are discussed. A mapping of international, national and NGO endeavours to make the CRC widely known to children follows. The range of endeavours discussed is by no means definitive, but rather plots some significant contributors to the Article 42 project. References to endeavours in each continent have been sourced, to reflect a global sketch of the actions taken. Yet, as an English-speaking Australian author, content on actions was limited to publications in English, and national actions are more Australian-centric as is the context I know best. What I provide is by no means definitive or comprehensive, but rather a broad brush stroke view of the global landscape of what is happening to promote the CRC to children in international programmes and national initiatives. To conclude, I will explore possible future directions as necessary awakenings for children to be and act as rights holders and claimers in all facets of society across the globe.

Public Discourse on Children's Rights

To understand why there has been minimal uptake of public promotion of the CRC to children, the following discusses a range of conceptions of children and childhood. Both historical and contemporary constructions of the child as unruly, as immanent, as innocent, as developing and as a social actor are explained. All constructions continue to be in circulation.

Historically, in societies children have little, if any, status. They are typically seen as the property of their parents or guardians, which originated from Roman law and has largely remained (see Archard, 2015), and as under the rule of teachers and schools, so that children are deprived of rights and treated any way their 'owners' see fit. The Christian Old Testament and the theories of philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1660/1996) argued for total parental dominion over children, who were understood as unruly, requiring adults to beat the wildness out through discipline and control. This way of thinking informed the establishment of schools (Luke, 1989), with the expectation that through sustained discipline, over time children would become good adult citizens who follow the social order (James *et al*, 1998). Violent disciplining of children continues to be permissible in schools in 98 nation states across the world (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2015). Other factors, such as the standardisation of curricular content and rules, also limit scope for children to make decisions and express opinions. Together, these factors of discipline and control insist on obedience and deprive children of their rights.

A view of a child as immanent (or a blank slate) informed by the tabula rasa thesis espoused by John Locke (Locke, 1690/1959) also supports a rightsless status for children. This is especially the case in status-based justifications based on the ability of rational thought. Reason is understood as being acquired with age, thus

defining children as becoming or latent reasoners. Based on this view, adults have a higher status and exercise control over children because of age, experience, and knowledge. Social policy in western societies perpetuates such a view by largely defining children and young people as “incompetents” (Morrow, 1994, p. 51). This enactment of children as immanent sees children removed from responsibility, and reliant on adults for care, protection and education. Children’s exclusion from various social practices and responsibilities, based on the perception of their inherent incompetence, drastically reduces opportunity for their participation rights.

Conceptions of children as angelic, uncorrupted by the world, and naturally good, as espoused by Rousseau (Rousseau, 1762/ 2007), inform a view of children as innocent. To Rousseau, children were born with a natural goodness. On the basis of this understanding, adults ‘generate a desire to shelter children from the corrupt surrounding world’ (Dahlberg *et al*, 1999, p. 45). Adults seek to maintain the natural goodness of children by protecting them from violence and corruption through surveillance, limitation, regulation and withholding knowledge. Such restraints create children who feel vulnerable and disempowered, reinforcing notions of child as ignorant or immanent (e.g., see Cannella & Viruru, 2004). As Dahlberg *et al* (1999) claimed, by protecting children from the world, adults do not respect the rights and capabilities of children to seriously engage in the world. A view of children as innocent dominates the implementation of the CRC, seeing widespread discourses of protection place emphasis on protection rights (James *et al*, 2008; Archard, 2015) rather than welcome children’s participation rights (e.g., access to information, freedom of thought and association, expression of opinions, and decision-making).

Empirical research conducted by Piaget (e.g., see 1932) in which he determined that there is a developmental pathway to intelligence shaped a view of children as developing. Such a view positions adults as competent and supreme, and children as incomplete, incompetent and irrational as a result of their developing status (James *et al*, 1998). Viewing children as in preparation for future participation (not agential in the present) masks the extent to which they are capable and undertake responsibility in their lives. The positioning of adults as competent and capable being who understand, translate and interpret children’s comments and actions (Waksler, 1991), sees knowledge of children’s rights being simplified and shared at stages when an adult deems the child is developmentally ready to understand.

More recently, there has been growing sociological interest in and attention to children and childhood. Sociological understandings acknowledge children as agential, with ‘social, political and economic status as contemporary subjects’ (James *et al*, 1998, p. 26) - that is, as rights holders and claimers of today.

In modern times, two key books, *Birthrights* (Farson, 1974) and *Escape from childhood* (Holt, 1975), forged a children’s liberation movement arguing for self-determination for children, so that they have the same rights as adults. Both authors positioned children as one of the major oppressed groups in western society, with families and schools as major sources of oppression for children. In the CRC, ‘children are not accorded the same self-determination rights as adults’ (McGowan, 2012, p. 74), due to their economic dependency and reduced access to civic institutions (James, Curtis, & Birch, 2008; Millei & Imre, 2009).

In opposition to the child liberationists are those who argue a caretaker thesis for children, which denies self-determination for children, because self-determination is deemed too important to be in the hands of children (Archard, 2015). Commitment to the caretaker thesis is informed by conceptions of children as innocent, immanent and developing, in that they are vulnerable, requiring protection, and have not yet developed the cognitive capacity for self-determination. Since the ratification of the CRC in 1989, the United Nations (UN), national, state and local governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have primarily focused on legislation, policies, action plans and reports to ensure children's rights to life, health, education and welfare. Yet, Farson (1974) would argue that such actions have been about protecting children, not their rights. As Archard (2015) explains, 'it is consonant with a paternalistic view of children as needing adults to secure their welfare' (p. 66). Child liberationists seek for children to choose and act themselves in their health, education and welfare rights. The caretaker thesis has dominated the implementation of the CRC - perhaps because it 'has a pleasing concordant completeness. A child is denied the right of self-determination in order that s/he should be able to exercise that right in adulthood' (Archard, 2015, p. 75). For example, by denying a child the right to choose schooling or not, the child will acquire necessary knowledge for reflective thought for self-determination.

Collectively, the above discussion captures a range of conceptions of children and childhood in public discourses that are shaping the implementation and promotion of the CRC. Historical constructions of children and childhood remain entrenched in public discourse, so that conceptions of children as unruly, immanent, innocent and developing continue to restrict and restrain fulfilment of children as rights holders and claimers, and paternalistic enactment of the CRC is maintained. The following sections will provide an overview of international and national programmes to promote children's rights to children, with consideration of how conceptions of children enable and constrain children's capacity to flourish as rights holders.

International programmes for children to know their rights

The United Nations and NGOs have played the most significant roles in the various initiatives enacted across the globe to promote the CRC since its ratification in 1989. To provide a sense of how social, political and cultural trends have influenced initiatives, they will be discussed roughly in chronological order of their commencement, starting with the UNICEF Child Friendly Schools, then the UNICEF Rights Respecting schools in UK and Canada, followed by the United Nations World Programme for Human Rights Education.

UNICEF Child Friendly Schools

Child Friendly Schools first developed in Thailand in 1997 (UNICEF, 2006), inspired by the principles of the CRC (UNICEF, 2009), and can be 'understood to be a microcosm of a society, where the social, cultural, economic, and political dynamics, including ethnolinguistic tensions, of nations and communities interact, collide, and are addressed through a rights-based approach' (Clair et al,

2012, p. 6). Motivated by children's right to education and the honouring of children as rights holders, the schools are established in areas where children do not have access to schooling. UNICEF developed the concept of Child Friendly Schools in recognition that single factor approaches (e.g., resource materials or professional development) produced short-lived gains, so they looked to a whole-package approach to improving the quality of education. By 2007, Child Friendly Schools in 56 countries. (UNICEF, 2009).

After the division of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, several countries in Central Eastern Europe experienced political instability, economic collapse and destruction of social services, so that countries such as Turkey, Macedonia and Azerbaijan looked to the international framework of Child Friendly Schools to improve their education systems in the 2000s. Clair et al (2012) found in their assessment of Child Friendly Schools in Central Eastern Europe that the schools usually include dimensions of: inclusiveness; effectiveness; a healthy, safe and protective learning environment; democratic participation; and equal opportunities regardless of gender. Children have a say in the form and substance of their education, enacting democratic participation.

A great example of children's democratic participation in Child Friendly Schools can be found in the child governments at Child Friendly Schools in Mali. The children participate in a two-month training course on child rights and Child Friendly Schools. They then analyse their school according to children's rights to choose areas in need of attention, form committees (with students from all grades) for each identified problem area and elect ministers, half of whom must be girls (UNICEF, 2009). The strategy rapidly spread across Mali schools and is now a nationally approved strategy by the Ministry of Education in Mali. Child governments provide children with knowledge of their rights and awareness that 'these rights have practical implications for themselves, their schools and their communities' (UNICEF, 2009, Chapter 5, p. 28). Such accounts of this initiative appear to reflect a construction of children as social actors, though the only source located is from UNICEF, which characteristically presents its programmes positively.

Child Friendly Schools continue to be established in countries in every continent. UNICEF actively promotes their Child Friendly Schools as models of quality practice to inform national education systems. Clair et al (2012) claim that 'observational and anecdotal data suggest that children are learning about their rights' (p. 19), offering 'a promising approach to improving educational quality and enhancing equity that is both school-based and system-focused' (p. 7). However, UNICEF recognises that 'there has been a tendency to overprescribe on Child Friendly Schools and to underemphasize training and capacity for using the CFS model in education systems' (p. 7). This suggests that the name and concept is often readily seized without adequate understanding of the right-based theoretical underpinnings. Regardless, there are thousands of Child Friendly Schools across the globe with overt embedded practices, making children's rights known to children in underprivileged nations, in what appears to be a vision of children as social actors of today.

UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools in UK and Canada

In economically rich nations, such as the UK and Canada, in collaboration with UNICEF, schools that wish to embrace rights-respecting practice and ethos have

sought to be certified as rights respecting. Referred to as Rights Respecting Schools, they teach, promote and respect children's rights (according to the CRC) and create everyday opportunities for students to practise their rights in classrooms, schools and communities.

The initiative began in the UK in 2004, and has played a significant role in the promotion of children's rights throughout the UK (Sebba & Robinson, 2010). To be awarded as a Rights Respecting School, schools are required to demonstrate the following four evidence-based standards:

- Rights respecting values underpin leadership and management;
- The whole school community learns about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- The school has a rights-respecting ethos;
- Children are empowered to become active learners and citizens (UNICEF UK, n.d, p. 4).

There are three levels to progress through, from recognition of commitment to level 2, which can take up to four years to achieve. Interest in and commitment to the initiative has consistently grown over the years, with over 3200 primary, secondary and special schools registered for the award in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales in 2014 (Robinson, 2014a).

UNICEF Canada commenced the Rights Respecting School initiative in 2007, drawing from the UK Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) with adaptation to the Canadian context. A 'Rights Respecting School involves placing the Convention at the heart of the school's culture' (UNICEF Canada, 2011, p. 3) and is based on four building blocks:

- Awareness for the whole school community of the CRC;
- Student participation in school community through sharing opinions and making decisions;
- Teaching and learning rights-respecting practice and responsibilities;
- Children's rights inform policies, programme choices and implementation.

The process of becoming a Rights Respecting School in Canada can take two to three years (UNICEF Canada, 2011).

Following a three-year evaluation (2007-2010) of UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting Schools Award, Sebba and Robinson (2010) found that across the 31 schools evaluated, rights and responsibilities were made explicit in lessons, assemblies, displays and most often in peer interaction and conflict resolution. Children in roles as Pupil Improvement Partners and RRSA ambassadors were also endorsed to promote knowledge and application of the rights of the child. Robinson (2014a) also witnessed a slackening of more rigid hierarchical power relations which have dominated school relationships, and a move towards adults and school staff engaging in more deliberate dialogue about school-related issues with children and young people. As a consequence of rights education and rights-respecting practice, Robinson found that pupils reported 'a greater enjoyment of school, classroom conditions more conducive to learning, positive attitudes towards diversity, a reduction in bullying and, where there were conflicts, pupils were more likely to resolve these themselves' (p. 18). Yet, it is important to acknowledge that amid these positive gains for children enrolled in Rights Respecting Schools, Robinson (2014b) identified two major concerns as to

how rights respecting these schools truly are for all children. Her first concern was that though the students made decisions about school-related issues, the nature of these issues were not central to the school; instead they were minor peripheral issues of little consequence. The relinquishing of adult control thus only occurred for matters that were inconsequential to the operation of the school. The second concern was that rights-respecting practices focused on students who agreed with what the adults in the school wanted to hear, as opposed to those whose views countered the school values, thus suggesting that there were conditions placed on children's rights.

Though there are great social and political gains for children in Rights Respecting Schools, it seems that the shackles of discipline and control that have ruled schools for centuries have only slightly loosened, to maintain adult control of what children make decisions about, and to listen to children only if they say what teachers want to hear. It is also unsettling that UNICEF runs two different school programmes to implement the CRC, one for developing (or post-conflict) countries and another for developed nations, with differing names. Is 'child friendly' the diminutive of 'rights respecting', perhaps unwittingly continuing global north paternalism? Clair et al (2012) also acknowledge the light nature of the label and its poor capacity to translate well into other languages.

World Programme for Human Rights Education – First Phase

Following the 1989 ratification of the CRC, NGOs like UNICEF and Save the Children have carried the main role in provisioning children's rights education resources. The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 noted little achievement in promoting human rights education (HRE) since the adoption of the UNDHR in 1948, thus declaring 1995-2004 the Decade of Human Rights Education. The value of human rights education was defined as 'essential for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities and for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace' (World Conference on Human Rights, 1993, p. 25). Within this HRE decade, UNESCO developed a 'Plan of Action: world programme for human rights education', Phase 1: 2005-2007 [1] (UNESCO, 2006) to guide efforts for improved implementation of human rights education in member states. The first phase of the world programme specifically 'to promote the inclusion and practice of human rights in the primary and secondary school systems' (UNESCO, 2006, p. 20).

The first phase (2005-2007) of the World Programme for Human Rights Education (WPHRE) encouraged member states to undertake, as a minimum, stages 1 (*analyse the situation of HRE in the school system*) and 2 (*develop a national implementation strategy*) and initiate stage 3 (*implement and monitor activities*). Unfortunately, many member states did not meet these stages within the first phase time frame (2005-2007), seeing an extension to 2009. Yet still little progress occurred, and to date only 19 member states (and none of these are English-speaking nations) have submitted national action plans for human rights education to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2015). For example, in Australia in 2009 the Human Rights Commission noted that:

- In Australia, there is no cohesive approach by state and territory education departments to the delivery of human rights education

at the primary and secondary levels...

- There is also a lack of professional development and support for educators (across all curriculum areas) who teach human rights content...
- In order to fulfil the goals of the WPHRE, the Commission has recommended to DEEWR [Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations] that there be an audit (situational analysis) of all of the human rights education initiatives that currently exist in Australian education systems. This has not occurred to date” (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2009, p.3).

When writing this chapter in December 2015, little had progressed in these three areas, aside from attention to teaching about and through human rights in the general capability of *ethical understanding* in the new national curriculum (more about this in the national curricula section later) and, in 2012, the first phase of a situational analysis of HRE in Australian schooling being funded and undertaken (see BurrIDGE et al., 2013); the second phase was to examine HRE in practice, but the incoming conservative federal government cut the funding.

Though the first phase of the world programme focused on HRE in primary and secondary schools and explicitly draws on the principles of the CRC, only teachers and school staff are referred to as rights holders in the document, not children and young people. Specific attention to education staff and parents as rights holders was also noted in many UNICEF documents, notably to address arguments against children’s rights, in which adults fear giving power to children and young people will result in reduced rights for adults (e.g., see Howe & Covell, 2005). However, evaluations of rights-based schools have demonstrate that HRE enhances relationships between staff and students (Covell & Howe, 2008; Sebba & Robinson, 2010) .

The world programme has brought greater global attention to HRE, with Tibbitts and Fernekes (2011) noting a significant increase in HRE resources, programmes and the embedding of HRE in national curricula since the launching of the world programme in 2005. Though the world programme addresses the broader umbrella of HRE, knowledge of the CRC is included; to what degree varies by nation, as discussed next.

National Initiatives

The following describes key national initiatives for children to know their rights. The three main avenues identified in review of literature, reports and online media are: national curricula and policy; children’s commissioners and media programmes. Once again, please note this is by no means a comprehensive coverage of national initiatives globally, but rather provides a sketch of key themes at play in national initiatives to educate children and young people on their rights.

National Curricula for Children and Young People

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child states: ‘Children do not lose their human rights by virtue of passing through the school gates’ (2001). However, as institutions of discipline and control, many schools do not honour children’s rights, or only in limited, tokenistic ways. Many human rights education scholars

and advocates, such as Fernekes (1992) and Tibbitts (2002, 2009) have argued for explicitly embedding the teaching of rights in curricula to build awareness of international human rights legal instruments to create greater social harmony. In 1992, Fernekes noted that since the 1980s most social studies curricula has overlooked or addressed in a very minimal way children's rights, especially as they are defined in the CRC. As this was only three years after the CRC was ratified, you may consider such understandable. However, now, more than 25 years since the CRC was ratified, the situation remains largely the same.

The Centre for Children's Rights, Queens University, Belfast recently led an investigation of the implementation by 12 countries (Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, Spain and Sweden) of the UNCRC (Lundy et al, 2012). They found that few interviewees (aside from Norway's) identified children's rights education as important in the implementation of the UNCRC. Most countries did include aspects of human rights and child rights in their school curricula, yet rarely in extensive ways to achieve any influence as the inclusion was only optional. For example, in examination of education policy in Sweden and New Zealand, Quennerstedt (2011) noted children's knowledge about their rights is constructed as a minor issue in Sweden, only occasionally mentioned and never thoroughly discussed, whilst it is not raised at all in New Zealand policy. Ramirez, et al's (2006) investigation of the growth of human rights education worldwide found that nations with a history of human rights abuses were slightly more likely to include HRE in curricula, and this was further increased if they had international linkages to the broader human rights movement. For example, the post-apartheid South African curriculum ensures that all learning areas reflect respect for human rights; however, Keet and Carrim (2006) question the politics at play, with the curriculum playing a symbolic role in marking the distinct move from apartheid to post-apartheid.

The perception that rights education is seen as political provides a strong rationale for the minimal uptake of embedding children's rights education in curricula. Actions of inequality and injustice enacted by states can be questioned and challenged, potentially placing schools in opposition to the state, and hence we witness states excluding children's rights in curricula regardless of multiple international imperatives (i.e., UNHCR, CRC and the World Programme for HRE). Rights education is often associated with Marxist or leftist agendas, so those schools that do employ rights education focus on content rather than advocacy (Tibbitts & Fernekes, 2011), what Tibbitts refers to as a values and awareness approach to HRE, whereas advocacy work follows a transformative approach (Tibbitts, 2002). Children's subservience, compliance, vulnerability and silence are maintained through active avoidance of children knowing their rights.

In early childhood curricula in Australia, it is a different story. For example, the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009) specifically states, 'Early childhood educators guided by the Framework will reinforce in their daily practice the principles laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention)' (p. 5). Attention to children's rights is woven throughout the document with a specified outcome dedicated to children knowing their rights. To further reinforce children's rights education in early childhood in Australia, the Australian Human Rights Commission and Early Childhood Australia (2015) have recently released

the 'Supporting Young Children's Rights: statement of intent (2015-2018)' 'to guide professionals working with young children to support and advocate for young children's rights in their day-to-day practice' (p. 1). In this document, one of five key themes is engaged civics and citizenship, which explicitly addresses children being informed of their rights. Comparatively, the Australian Curriculum (version 8) (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2015) for schools only mentions the CRC as a possible investigation in history and in civics and citizenship for year 10 in secondary school. Attention to understanding rights as a concept is explicitly defined in the general capacity of *ethical understanding*; however, no rights document is referred to to inform such learning. Those in the early childhood sector in Australia are noticeably stronger proponents for children's rights than in the schooling sector. Perhaps it is considered less threatening to adult control for younger children to know their rights.

Schools seem to offer the ideal forum to address the international imperative of article 42 of the CRC, in that schooling is compulsory in most member states, maximising information to the broadest population of children across the world. Unfortunately, as the above brief summary of assessments of CRC in national curricula attests, the uptake has been minimal, suggesting deficit constructions of children (i.e. as unruly, immanent, innocent, developing) dominating curriculum development.

Children's Commissioners

One strategy to promote children's rights that member states have progressively adopted has been the appointment of a public representative to advocate for children. Norway was the first nation to appoint a public representative for children through the role of the Ombudsman for Children in 1981. Sweden followed with a Commissioner for Children established in 1985. Since then many other countries have followed: New Zealand in 1989, Wales in 2001, Northern Ireland in 2003, Scotland in 2004, England in 2005, and Australia in 2013. [2] Children's commissioners across the world have all contributed significantly to increasing children's knowledge and understanding of their rights through varying dissemination strategies (Boylan & Dalrymple, 2009).

In Australia, within two years of appointment, the national children's commissioner, Megan Mitchell (with her team), implemented a number of strategies to promote children's awareness of the CRC. These strategies have sought to rectify the United Nations Concluding Observations to Australia's report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2012): 'the Committee remains concerned that awareness and knowledge of the Convention continues to be limited amongst children, professionals working with or for children, and the general public' (p. 5). In 2013, the children's commissioner facilitated the *Big Banter* to consult with children across Australia both face to face and through online surveys. A major theme identified was children's and the general public's limited knowledge about children's rights (National Children's Commissioner, 2013). The following year the commissioner's office developed children's rights resources, child- and youth-friendly versions of her 2013 and 2014 children's rights reports, and child- and youth-friendly versions of the 2012 United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's Concluding Observations (National Children's Commissioner, 2014)

Children's commissioners have proven to play significant roles in the promotion of children's rights; however, their role often yields little political power. The powers they yield vary across nations but often have 'no executive authority, both legally and via instruction' (Boylan & Dalrymple, 2009, p. 29). They are appointed as public servants and so advise and provide information to the government of their nation.

Media Programmes for Children's Rights

Another initiative to make the CRC well known to both children and adults involves public media programmes. Saunders and Goddard (2002, n.p.) claim that 'the constructive use of mass media can assist in teaching children and young people socially desirable ways of dealing with conflict, knowledge of their rights to integrity and protection from harm, healthy eating habits and lifestyles, and ways to assert themselves and their rights in a positive, acceptable manner'. Further, media scholars note that media for children and popular culture play a powerful role in children's shared culture and meaning-making (e.g. see Perry, 2013).

Perhaps the most well-known and longest-lasting media programme on children's rights is South Africa's Soul Buddyz, developed by the Soul City Institute (a South African non-governmental organisation that seeks to develop safe and healthy communities through mass media interventions) (Goldstein et al, 2001). It began distribution in 2000 for children (8-12-year-olds) to learn their rights in a way that had meaning with their own life experiences. The project consists of a television programme, radio programme and supporting print material. To date there have been five series of the television programme from 2000 to 2011, each with 26 thirty-minute episodes with child actors facing rights issues in everyday life experiences, screened on South Africa's most popular channel. The radio programme provides similar content to the television series through radio plays, along with young people and experts hosting a talk show on rights issues. Throughout South Africa, year 7 students receive booklets (linked to the television programme) and three posters (with a game to assess whether rights were being infringed). Through newspapers and NGOs, parents receive a parenting booklet on how to communicate respectfully with children, building their self-esteem and supporting them through life's challenges.

To maintain public dialogue on children's rights issues and to be consultative with children and the community, the programme facilitates multiple strategies such as Soul Buddyz clubs in schools which aim to provide a platform that gives voice to, and promotes real action for, children's health and wellbeing, and regular community evaluations. The concept of Soul Buddyz clubs began in 2003, in response to children's requests, and they were set up through a partnership between the Soul City Institute, the South African Broadcasting Channel (SABC) Education (a national broadcaster channel) and the Department of Education (Schmid et al, 2010). By 2009, 5255 clubs existed, representing a quarter of South African primary schools, mostly in poor, rural under-resourced communities (Schmid et al, 2010). Facilitated by trained volunteer educators, the clubs are founded on 'principles of ongoing learning, child participation, children's rights and children as active and proactive citizens and agents of change' (Schmid et al., 2010, p. 274). In Schmid et al's evaluation of the successfulness of Soul Buddyz clubs, evidence demonstrated 'children could

advocate on behalf of themselves and could mobilise community members and institutions to ensure that school and community needs were being addressed' (p. 280). All facilitators of the club declared to Schmid et al that having children lead the process was central to each club's success. However, Schmid et al questioned the degree to which clubs can be child-led when the programme is highly structured and monitored by the Soul City Institute. Widespread participation in the programme continues across across South Africa (Soul City Institute, 2015).

The potential to promote the CRC to children and young people through media seems largely untapped. The Office of the Ombudsman for Children, Republic of Ireland launched in 2014 an iPad app called *Its Your Right* in an effort to tap into new media platforms, though it is information based with limited interactivity. Appealing to young audiences requires innovative utilisation of the agency new media affords (Kalantzis & Cope, 2010) and connection with popular culture interests (Perry, 2013), with children's rights embedded into everyday stories with hooks of interest: the unusual, the fantastical, the risky, the adventurous.

Potential awakenings for the UNCRC to be widely known to children

The preceding discussion plotted actions that have taken place to make the CRC widely known to children. They have most significantly occurred through NGOs, with only a small percentage of children being reached. There clearly are blocks, given that more than 25 years of this international imperative have passed. Commonly held perceptions of children and childhood play a significant role in the hindrances and avoidance of CRC promotion and education, and many argue that progress has not happened in schools because children's rights education is scarce in teacher education and professional development. Potential ways forward for making the CRC widely known to children require shifts in attitude towards children, teacher education and innovative and creative utilisation of new media.

Many (e.g., UNESCO, 2006; Tibbitts & Fernekes, 2011; BurrIDGE et al., 2013; Robinson, 2014a) recommend the need for: teacher education on rights education, and teachers already in the profession requiring comprehensive professional development. The World Programme for HRE (first phase) explicitly noted the stipulation of training for teachers in HRE in education policies to provide 'necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and competencies to facilitate the learning and practice of human rights in schools' (p. 19). Robinson (2014a) explains that 'new entrants to the profession need to be able to see the value of schools adopting a rights-respecting approach, and have an understanding about how to promote this work in schools' (p. 19). At present, the typical offering of human rights courses at universities are located in history, political and social sciences departments of universities, with little evidence of cross-disciplinary course work or study in HRE (Tibbitts & Fernekes, 2011). And Tibbitts (2002) points out that human rights training is typically provided by people who have had experience in human rights education; there is no standard of what defines a human rights education trainer. Further educational research into the knowledge and skills, values and attitudes, and actions employed in the teaching and learning of children and young people's rights in early childhood

settings and schools is required to guide and inform HRE in teacher education. Education faculties need to collaborate with political and social science departments to develop and provide tuition on rights education courses that demonstrate rights as defined in UN instruments through experiential democratic processes, as recommended (e.g., see Lansdown, 2001; Howe & Covell, 2005; McGowan, 2012). Globally, at present, high-stakes assessment dominates schooling practice, policy and decision-making, which shifts attention to numbers rather than social gains. Evaluations (e.g., Covell & Howe, 2008) of children's rights education programmes list many learning outcomes, to play into the outcomes-based rhetoric of the present neo-liberal agenda. McGowan (2012) proposes that we look more broadly to 'the potential positive effect on the rest of society of the very existence of these 'oases' of respect for rights' to offer 'a beacon of hope of what is possible in the present and the future' (p. 75) and that we should not feel obliged to demonstrate learning but rather that we honour children's rights on the basis of their inherent dignity.

Decision-makers will make teacher education and professional development in children's rights education happen when they see children as social actors, as citizens of today, as opposed to clinging to perceptions of children as unruly, innocent, incompetent and developing. The provocation for such an attitudinal shift can be enabled through first-hand experiences with children demonstrating their capabilities and competence as citizens of the world (e.g., see Hickey & Phillips, 2013; Phillips & Hickey, 2013; Phillips, 2014), so that the joy, curiosity, concerns and capabilities of being a child are heard, seen and felt.

Finally, to inform children of their rights, the broad range of information technology available needs to be tapped into. South Africa's Soul Buddyz multi-pronged programme offers a great example, though now we have many platforms to play with. New media provide readily accessible agency for children and young people to select the texts they view and create themselves (e.g., YouTube clips, memes, vines). The way children and young people utilise media needs to be carefully considered and embedded into CRC communication strategies in order to captivate them. Children already initiate and create texts on their lived experiences. Perhaps an online network of slightly older buddies, like the child government model in Mali (whose members have training on the CRC), can act to highlight honouring and denial of children's rights as comments or pop-ups on highly utilised platforms like YouTube and Facebook.

The way forward for children to be fully honoured as rights holders requires openness to children's ways of being, structural commitment to rights education and experiential creativity and innovation.

Notes

[1] To date there have been three phases to the World Programme for Human Rights Education: Phase 1, 2005-2007 (extended to 2009); Phase 2, 2010-2014; and Phase 3, 2015-2019.

[2] States and territories of Australia appointed children's commissioners earlier, the first being appointed in Queensland in 1996.

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