University of
Strathclyde
Glasgow

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Teaching human rights? 'All hell will break loose!'

Claire Cassidy, Richard Bruner and Elaine Webster

Abstract

Human Rights Education (HRE) is a prominent concern of a number of international organisations and has been dominant on the United Nations' (UN) agenda for the past twenty years. The UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004) has been followed by the World Programme for Human Rights Education (2005-ongoing) and the recently-adopted UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training.

This paper shares findings from a project that aimed to gauge the knowledge of HRE of students undertaking initial teacher education and childhood practice programmes at one university in Scotland. Students were invited to share their experiences of and attitudes towards HRE. While some students were confident in their approach to HRE, others identified barriers, including their own knowledge and the structures acting upon them as teachers. Initial conclusions suggest that Education students feel ill-equipped to engage with HRE and that this issue must be addressed in initial teacher education courses.

Introduction

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted in December 1948 and articulates a range of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. Article 26 pertains specifically to education. Not only does it state that everyone is entitled to education and that this should be free 'at least in the elementary and fundamental stages' (UDHR, Article 26 (1)), it makes clear that '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 has been argued that, in effect, this means that 'human rights education itself is a human right' (Stellmacher & Sommer, 2008, p. 70; Howe & Covell, 2010; Bajaj, 2011a; Bajaj, 2011b).

The fundamental importance of human rights education (HRE) is acknowledged by a number of initiatives, such as the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004), the World Programme for Human Rights Education (2005-ongoing) – currently in its second phase – and the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training adopted in December 2011. The issue has also been addressed by the Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union, the Council of Europe and Amnesty International, amongst others. In addition to the UDHR, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), adopted by the United Nations (UN) in 1989, also emphasised that children's rights were inherently the same as those of adults (MacNaughton, Hughes & Smith, 2007). Indeed, Quennerstedt (2010) suggests that because children's rights have merged with human rights, due to the terminology employed, it might be supposed that the basic rights of adults should also be enjoyed by children. This, in itself, raises an issue; that of children's rights as opposed to human rights.

Howe and Covell (2010) acknowledge that children possess rights, that they are neither goods nor chattels of their parents and that it is the adult community, in the form of parents or the state, that have the responsibility for the provision of those rights. Indeed, Kiwan (2005) takes issue with what she sees as a confusion between rights one is ascribed by virtue of being a citizen, a member of a political community, for example, voting rights, and natural rights afforded to individuals as human beings, such as a right to respect – human rights. In the literature an implied distinction is commonly made between children's rights and human rights, suggesting that somehow children are not humans. This is not to suggest that the authors of the UNCRC did not see children as humans, but that the philosophical distinction might determine that the application of the UNCRC and associated legislation and practice runs the risk of 'othering' children. Indeed, in 1989, at the inception of the UNCRC there had previously been 'no recognition of a child's autonomy, of the importance of a child's views, nor any appreciation of the concept of empowerment' (Freeman, 2000, p.277). Although the Council of Europe, in 1950, published the European Convention on Human Rights, the international community later asserted that children demanded special attention, particularly in relation to their protection, provision and participation. It was this view that led to the drafting and subsequent ratification of the UNCRC.

This distinction, between children and humans, although there is not space to explore it here, is similar to discussions relating to the nature of child and childhood as being other to adult (see, for example, Jenks, 1996; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Mayall, 2007; Cassidy, 2007, forthcoming; Stables, 2008). Literature related to rights and education, or rights and children tends to be allied more to children's rights as opposed to human rights. Indeed,

Quennerstedt (2011) goes so far as to suggest that 'education seems to be particularly unreceptive to children's rights' (p.675). This leads us to the aim of this article.

It is not clear how teachers and teacher educators engage with human rights education. It is suggested that whilst children's rights might be visible to a certain extent in education, the prominence of human rights education is not at all clear. Covell, Howe and Polegato (2011) explain that human rights education should be about ensuring children in schools learn about their human rights through the lens of the UNCRC and that school practice should be informed by these rights. Indeed, the UN Plan of Action, a product of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, aspires to ensure that HRE involves the training of teachers in order that HRE curricula ensure that they 'convey human rights values, such as equality and non-discrimination, while affirming the interdependence, indivisibility and universality of the principles [of human rights]' (p.3) and that these should be accessible to children via practical, realistic, meaningful and contextualized activities (Bromley, 2011). Stellmacher and Sommer (2008) highlight that despite emphasis on HRE from the UN and UNESCO, there is little empirical research into HRE. The present article describes a study in one Scottish university with a group of undergraduate and postgraduate Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students and students on a Childhood Practice Bachelors degree course to gauge their experiences of teaching about human rights and their confidence in HRE more generally.

Bajaj (2011a) notes that there are a range of perspectives in relation to HRE. She acknowledges that there is some agreement about key elements of HRE, for example, that 'most scholars and practitioners agree that HRE must include both *content* and *process* related to human rights' (p. 482, italics original) and that what has been written about human rights tends to be goal directed. It is not sufficient, says Bajaj, that children learn

about human rights, but that the process or practice of learning about human rights should be through a participatory, human rights approach. This, of course, demands that the teachers themselves are confident and knowledgeable about human rights issues and the teaching of human rights (Bajaj, 2011b). It is through teachers that children will gain much of their understanding of human rights therefore influencing their engagement with human rights more broadly. Indeed, HRE depends very much on teacher education (Bron & Thijs, 2011). It is important, according to Gündoğdu and Yildirim (2010), that teachers know how to teach democracy as well as human rights as the two are intertwined. This is an indication of the links made, in the literature as well as in practice, between rights education and education for citizenship. Rapoport (2010) makes the link to global citizenship, as do Howe and Covell (2010) who suggest that children should learn about their rights and responsibilities at school and that children's rights education is part of education for citizenship, allowing children to learn about their rights and responsibilities. This said, caution should be taken in the emphasis placed on the teaching and learning of responsibilities. Howe and Covell (2010) emphasise that the UNCRC only refers to state responsibilities, thereby indicating the responsibilities of those in authority, including parents, to respect the rights of the child and that a child's entitlement to his or her rights is not dependent on children fulfilling certain responsibilities. Their study found a preponderance of staff emphasising responsibilities over rights, with one school electing to teach only about responsibilities in one year before introducing the notion of rights the following year. Indeed, they accuse schools who over-emphasise responsibilities over rights and 'burden children with a sense of duty' (p.92) of miseducating children about their rights and this, therefore, has implications for children even understanding the concept of rights, with the added note from Bromley (2011), that by focusing on responsibilities there is no

assurance that responsibility will be promoted in children. This, she says, can only be achieved with a focus on rights.

While the teaching of human rights may appropriately be included within any approach to education for citizenship, Rapoport (2010) reports that while many teachers see global citizenship as important, many do not consider themselves to be confident in their teaching of it. This does not bode well for HRE if seen as a smaller topic within the over-arching citizenship theme.

To contextualize this problem further, approaches to education for citizenship vary – even within the four countries constituting the United Kingdom. In Scotland, for instance, education for citizenship is not a discrete subject or topic. Although the Scottish curriculum, *Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive, 2004), strives to promote responsible citizenship, notions of citizenship are expected to permeate all aspects of teaching and learning within the formal and informal curriculum. Indeed, given that responsibility on the part of children is not advocated by the UNCRC, its aim being to identify freedoms accorded individuals in relation to the state, it is noteworthy that the (adult) authors of the Scottish curriculum documentation chose to align citizenship with responsibility. In addition, the experiences and outcomes detailed in *Curriculum for Excellence* make explicit reference to children learning about rights. This should be done through a cross-curricular approach in areas such as health and well-being, social subjects and religious and moral education. The over-arching banner, however, under which teachers and children will explore notions of rights is that of responsible citizenship, despite the clear directive that rights education should not be about the teaching of responsibilities.

Indeed, it is important that the context in which children learn about rights is in line with a human rights perspective and that there should be 'learning methodologies in human rights education activities which are child-friendly, learner-centred and encourage participation' (United Nations, 2010, p.16). This is likely to be more difficult if teachers are not confident in their knowledge and abilities in the teaching of human rights in the first place; there cannot be pedagogy without content.

Chamberlain (2001) suggests that non-governmental organisations are likely to be helpful in supporting schools in contextualising human rights teaching as they will have a bank of case studies that might easily be adapted for the classroom. One issue that can compound the poor implementation of HRE is that the examples teachers use to highlight rights may be far removed from the children's own context, leading children to believe that human rights is a distant issue that does not have a strong bearing on the lives they lead (Chamberlain, 2001; Bromley, 2011). Bajaj (2011b) describes human rights educators in India as being different to the typical classroom teacher as 'they are provided with additional content knowledge on human rights history, norms and standards, as well as participatory pedagogical techniques' (p.209). Having such background information might in some ways counter the fears that many teachers appear to have in relation to HRE. For some the fears arise out of lack of knowledge and this might easily be addressed through a programme of education, either in the initial stages of teacher education while at university or in continuing professional development for working teachers (Rapoport, 2010). For others, however, the potential reaction from children's parents in teaching their children about rights is what causes anxiety, with the suggestion that parents might complain because they disagree with what is being taught (Rapoport, 2010). This also links to Howe and Covell's (2010) discussion on

prioritising responsibilities over rights and the fact that for many adults children appear to have 'too many rights and not enough responsibilities' (p.91). Chamberlain's (2001) research into HRE for nursing students highlighted a similar anxiety; that when individuals are more aware of their rights they will be more likely to demand that these are acknowledged. This is echoed by Bajaj (2011a) when she highlights the fear that in response to learning about human rights there are likely to be '"rising demands" related to justice' (p.488). Allied to this fear is that teachers worry that they might be accused of indoctrinating children or demonstrating political bias (Chamberlain, 2001).

Bajaj (2011a; 2011b) introduces an interesting notion; that through teaching human rights, some teachers changed. She describes the 'transformative processes' (Bajaj, 2011a, p.504) that these teachers go through in terms of their professional and personal lives. There is, she says, a knock-on effect of their being more knowledgeable and confident in the area of human rights and that this impacts upon those around them, beyond the immediate sphere of the school. This is further borne out by studies undertaken by Bron and Thijs (2010) who investigated the impact of learning about human rights on university students. The results show clearly that after only a few seminars there were changes in the students in terms of the attitudes to human rights as well as the knowledge they had gained as a result. This, in turn, led to greater confidence in dealing with human rights issues. This information in itself is helpful in considering the impact there may be on children learning about human rights but, perhaps more importantly in the first instance, that in order to address teachers' fears of HRE, they themselves may benefit from a programme of study in human rights.

The Scottish context

While the Standard for Initial Teacher Education (General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS),2006a) and the Standard for Full Registration (GTCS, 2006b) demand that student teachers and qualified teachers, 'Know about and understand the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995' (2006, p. 9) and that they 'Demonstrate respect for the rights of all children and young people without discrimination as defined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1991, the Children (Scotland) Act 1995, the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 and the Additional Support for Learning Act 2005' (2006, p.15), there is no mention of human rights more generally. Indeed, the Standard for Chartered Teacher, the professional qualification which recognises advanced professionalism, where a 'Chartered Teacher is an accomplished, innovative teacher who demonstrates sustained, enhanced expertise in practice' (GTCS, 2009, p. 1), has no statement about rights at all, but suggests that the teacher concerned "actively promotes the values, principles and practices of equality and social justice in all areas of work" (ibid, p. 1). It may be that the GTCS assumes that human rights is embedded within this practice, but it would be reasonable to suggest that it does not necessarily mean that Chartered Teachers must teach about human rights but that we *may* assume that their teaching embodies human rights pedagogy. Similarly, the Standard for Headship (Scottish Executive, 2005) does not refer to rights. The document certainly refers to ethics, inclusion, social justice, equality and respect but, again, this does not privilege a human rights approach towards school staff, the parents and community the school serves, or the children under whose charge the head is placed. It may be argued that terms such as those listed above imply that human rights are evident in the Standard. However, the absence of specific reference to rights is concerning, given the prominence

that the United Nations accord to HRE in education systems and in the practices of those employed within them. At best one might suggest that Chartered Teachers and head teachers have met the Standard for Full Registration, as teachers, and therefore, must have met the benchmarks that relate to children's rights. However, a more positive message might be one that states explicitly that head teachers should run their schools with a focus on human rights; this focus being on the human rights of those associated with the school itself and in relation to those beyond the local environment of the school.

There are, in Scotland, UNICEF sponsored Rights Respecting Schools awards which recognise schools that 'not only teach[es] about children's rights but also model[s] rights and respect in all its relationships: between teachers / adults and pupils, between adults and between pupils' (http://www.unicef.org.uk/rrsa accessed 27/10/11). Many schools in Scotland have won their Rights Respecting Schools award, and whilst it may be suggested that for the award to have been won, there must have been some awareness raising of rights within a school, again this initiative focuses on children's rights rather than the broader notion of human rights.

Given that human rights education relies on individual teachers acknowledging its import and being confident in delivering HRE, it would seem appropriate that initial teacher education (ITE) students receive some input in this area on their course, experience teaching HRE and observe teachers on placement teaching human rights. This study determined therefore, to find out what knowledge, understanding and experiences ITE and BA Childhood Practice (BACP*) students at one university might have in relation to human rights education and their level of confidence in teaching human rights.

Methodology

An anonymised online survey asking a series of open and scaled questions on awareness, experience, knowledge of resources, interest in human rights education and confidence in teaching human rights was sent to all current BEd, PGDE(Primary), PGDE(Secondary) and BACP students at the university. A total of 148 students responded. Dominant themes from respondents were identified by the researchers independently reading through textual answers, comparing findings and discussing interpretations.

Of the 148 respondents, seven students also attended focus group interviews to explore emerging issues further - two first year BEd, two fourth year BEd, one postgraduate primary student and two BACP students. Separate interviews were held for each cohort, with the same interview schedule used each time, aiming to explore key themes, namely the teaching about human rights received by students on their current courses; any continuing professional development (CPD) received about human rights; how tutors at the university might better support students to increase their understanding of human rights and of how to teach human rights; what it is about human rights that might be challenging to integrate into practice; whether anxiety about teaching human rights is an issue of lack of subject knowledge or a lack of confidence; where the university's responsibility to teach about human rights education ends and the students' responsibility begins; and to find out whether interviewees had personally developed any resources for teaching human rights to use on placement or (BACP students) whilst working with children. Where interviews had at least two participants, they were encouraged to discuss the issues freely and were assured that conflicting opinions were acceptable.

The interviews were transcribed and, drawing on Miles and Huberman's (1994) approach, a content analysis was conducted. The researchers independently read through each transcript several times, noting key points and themes. Findings were collated and themes compared to those from the online survey. Appropriate ethical scrutiny procedures, in line with the university's code of practice, were followed throughout.

The interpretation of findings has constraints. First, the self-selecting sample for the survey and interviews makes generalisation to the whole body of students invalid; second, volunteers taking part in interviews in particular were likely to be those with a pre-existing interest in the topic. The aim of the study was not to be representative but to use qualitative data analysis to explore tensions for student teachers and childhood practitioners undertaking the BA, in relation to teaching human rights topics. In contrast, reliability of the findings may be advanced first by the interview schedules being informed by the responses to the wider online survey; second, by comparison of findings across the four interviews; third, through comparison between themes emerging from the survey and those emerging from the interviews; and fourth, by the interpretation of all responses being discussed across the research team.

Findings and discussion

Almost all respondents to the online survey expressed that they were interested in human rights issues and the vast majority agreed that it was important that children be taught about human rights. Respondents were divided equally over whether they were personally knowledgeable about human rights. Reinforcing this, two thirds of respondents did not feel confident in teaching about human rights and two thirds believed that it was not easy to

teach children about human rights. However, the vast majority of respondents could cite

resources for supporting their teaching of human rights, from the general (UNICEF, Oxfam,

Amnesty International) to the specific (one respondent mentioned two books, *Citizenship*

for the Future by David Hicks and *Children as Citizens* by Cathie Holden and Nick Clough).

Specific tensions in teaching HRE were identified by participants in three areas: human

rights versus children's rights; fear of parents' reactions to teaching human rights topics;

and perceptions amongst students that teaching human rights is qualitatively different from

teaching other subjects. Quotations from participants are selected where these exemplify

the themes.

Human rights versus children's rights

The importance of distinguishing human rights from children's rights was established in the

literature review above. Although questions in the interviews consistently referred to

'human rights', respondents across all four interviews reverted to discussing 'children's

rights' or to using ambiguous language:

> *I feel that my training this year has helped me be the teacher I want to be, but*
>
> *equally with human rights and children's rights – whatever – equally with that I feel*
>
> *that there are areas like – if I have a deaf child in my class in August – I don't know*
>
> *what to do…*

This was associated with the ways in which the student teachers perceived that the teaching

they had received at the university also had a focus on children's rights. Indeed,

interviewees were clear that they had received some teaching on the subject of rights with a

focus on children's rights, viewed by one respondent as logical: '*we briefly went over Human*

Rights and then focused on Child – and the children – which was understandable'. One of

the students identified that there had been some consideration of the *'ambiguity of*

children's rights' in a third year philosophy of education module, but, again, this centred on

children.

In an attempt to gauge to what extent student teachers and early years workers made this

distinction, respondents to the online survey were asked which aspects of human rights

they had learned about during their course. About one-third referred to learning about the

rights of the child or the UNCRC only. Smaller numbers considered that they learned 'none'

or were not sure: *'none specifically, but I am aware of children's rights and hope that this is*

apparent in my day to day work and any work I submit'. Others stated that they had

learned about additional support needs and *Getting it Right for Every Child* (Scottish

Executive, 2006), or that they had learned about the rights of specific social groups, such as

migrants or *'racism, secratarianism [sic], equal rights for GLBT people'.* Coming from a

sample of students with a particular interest in human rights, these perceptions suggest that

students have a very low level of human rights discourse in their ITE and childhood practice

courses and that this discourse gives way to an emphasis on children's rights. Quennerstedt

(2010) suggests that by viewing children as humans, and therefore considering human rights

more fully, this 'will benefit the expansion of the whole range of children's rights' (p.631).

This inherently relates to the discourse on child and child status, as discussed previously,

where the 'othering' of children might be seen to diminish the notion of human rights for

children.

However, a small number of respondents expressed a broader and deeper understanding of

human rights, being able to list a range of rights that children should learn about, for

example, *'protection rights, survival rights, development rights, participation rights, rights to have rights'* or in suggesting that some students may understand and interpret human rights topics through an integrated curricular approach, consistent with the Scottish *Curriculum for Excellence*. The idea of an integrated approach is advocated by Gündoğdu and Yildirim (2010). Their advice follows the observations of the United Nations (2010) recognising that some countries teach human rights as a discrete subject while highlighting that 'The plan of action calls for the integration of human rights education in the school curriculum' (p. 7) but this remains difficult if student teachers fail to recognise the very nature of human rights in the first place.

The responses suggest that a wide range of understandings about human rights exists amongst student teachers and BACP students; as a consequence, children's rights risk becoming the dominant narrative. Very few respondents articulated their learning about human rights in a deeper sense. Further research is required to understand what students with this more profound understanding may be drawing on, but it is clear that this sample does not have a consistent or shared level of understanding. It is all too easy, in this context, to offer a comfortable, palatable or 'nice' approach to the teaching of rights and that such an approach risks denying children the right to have teachers able to teach them using an educational discourse of human rights where HRE is evidenced in the informal and hidden curriculum as well as the formal (Bromley, 2011). This, therefore, extends HRE beyond the classroom.

Parents' reactions: fantasy and reality

The online survey revealed perceptions amongst a small number of respondents, which were then considered in depth in the focus groups, that parents may be a barrier to teaching human rights. Cultural, religious and moral factors were cited, for example: *'Could offend some parents as it could conflict with other cultures present in the UK, therefore there is a need to take into account other cultures'* or that *'Some religious sects may disagree with some human rights. Some children/families from countries where human rights are not being met on a regular basis may not wish children to take part'*. It was not at all clear from the survey responses why these students considered this to be a problem or that they may, in fact, challenge a parent holding such views.

The interviews with the BEd1 and PGDE students, the least experienced teachers in the sample, uncovered further anxieties about parental reactions to teaching human rights. There was concern that children might begin to assert their rights when at home and that some parents may not like this. A common response was that

> *if you tell a child that they have the right to do something and then they go back home and they say, well, I have the right to say what I want and do what I want, the parent may complain to the school about how the children have perceived the human rights section.*

When pressed if students knew of any instances when parents had complained about what was being taught in relation to potentially controversial issues, none had encountered any difficulties. Further, there was the suggestion that

> *there needs to be some kind of policy or legislation to say what are your boundaries or what are the steps or the procedures you need to take, that if you're going to be*

> *teaching something sensitive then it is ok to pop a letter home and say – do you have a problem with this?*

In response to this type of suggestion, the students were asked if there was a reason why permission would similarly need to be sought for teaching about issues such as gender, race, religion or poverty. Students did not think it necessary to seek permission for discussing issues around these topics but had evidently elevated the notion of HRE to something controversial. One student acknowledged that she was frightened of the '*blame culture*' and that because she was a new and inexperienced teacher she thought that it was safest to '*always cover your back*'. One of the BEd4 students, however, with more placement experience than the other students, had taught about the Holocaust on placement with a primary seven class (age 11). She had invited a Holocaust survivor in to the classroom to speak with the children and hadn't considered seeking parents' permission: '*because they were very much focused on his story. I don't think there was anything that was said that…was inappropriate and there were no parents complaining whatsoever*'. For students in this study, the relationship between parents and teachers in teaching about human rights was unclear.

The BACP interviewees were early years practitioners who admitted that there was some nervousness about parents on the part of some of their staff. Some parents had spoken to them, as managers, about teaching about human rights. However, the parents had questions rather than complaints and these had been easily resolved. Questions arose because children had been looking at pictures of farmers in poverty as part of a topic. The nursery staff had explained, when asked what the children had been learning, that the children '*weren't talking about death every day… they [the children] had to get the whole*

story; we couldn't just tap in and give them a story about Charlie and Lola… we had to go to real life'. This contextualised learning was a key feature for the students; they were keen that children only learn about human rights in a clear context, as with any learning.

What is perhaps notable in these examples is that the students, particularly the BEd student teachers, have genuine fears around the teaching of human rights, but that these may more accurately be in relation to their nervousness around working with parents and that this perhaps becomes heightened for sensitive topics, which human rights is perceived as being. However, in this sample the fear is not borne out by the reality in cases where the students, while nervous, had taught some human rights based topics such as a topic contextualised under the frame of reference to the South African World Cup. It may be that students working with young children may need greater clarity on the '*right to teach*' human rights topics and this is allied to the need for initial teacher education to address students' confidence in teaching human rights. This, of course, is related to students' concerns about topic content.

What to teach and how to teach human rights

When asked in the online survey whether they perceived any barriers to implementing HRE within the Scottish curriculum, *Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive, 2004), a range of qualitative insights and tensions were raised. Respondents identified how to teach human rights as a barrier, as a sensitive and sometimes complex topic requiring incorporation across the curriculum. Others suggested that a lack of understanding of human rights itself may be a barrier, a subject knowledge gap. The data suggests that this qualitative difference is expressed across two dimensions: what to teach and how to teach it. This was reinforced in the interviews where perceived complexity of breadth and depth in

learning about human rights was expressed by interviewees. It was perceived as involving more planning than other topics. There was a suggestion that this may put students off taking relevant modules during their course as other modules may be perceived as being easier. Indeed, human rights were seen as involving both knowledge (including legal knowledge) and opinion; and HRE as being both very academic and highly interpretive and that it involves both emotional sharing and moral debate. Howe and Covell (2010) found that teachers are not confident in the teaching of human rights as they are poorly prepared for this in initial teacher education. On the other hand, when they are introduced to the idea of the benefits of teaching about rights and when their own knowledge is enhanced, there is more support for teaching about rights, using a 'participatory pedagogy' (p. 97) illustrative of a rights-based pedagogical approach. From the survey and the interviews it was clear that the student teachers in this study were not confident in their own human rights teaching practice.

When explored further in interview, fears of BEd1 students were revealed: how to overcome complexity; how to pitch teaching at the right level for the children; how to manage discussion amongst pupils; how to take account of the differing life experiences of pupils including those who may have had or may be having their human rights breached, for example, those experiencing domestic abuse. One BEd1 student stated that '*the trickiest thing for me would be – how can I do this in a way which is appropriate for them [children]'*. When asked if there would be the same fear if asked to teach about the Victorians the student said no, that because the Victorians were in the past, that the topic would not affect the children's futures much. Human rights were seen as a current issue, not a past issue, and this adds to the anxieties in teaching about it. The students articulated concerns

around the comparative depth in lesson planning, sensitivity to children's prior experiences, emotional sharing with children and how to respond to children's questions as compared with other subjects. However, the students in the interviews resolved the dilemma for themselves by suggesting that they would prepare thoroughly and that if asked a question they were uncertain of they would offer strategies to the children for them to find out together and that it would be important to '*share emotionally*'. This suggests that it may be the process of talking through teaching human rights that supports student teachers to start to address anxieties about human rights being a different category from other subjects. This mirrors a finding from the online survey about sensitivity of human rights topics when taught to younger children in particular. The concern expressed several times was that children may be upset by learning about human rights or the difficulty, as identified by Covell *et al* (2011) of asking '*pupils to relate to complex situations so foreign from their own lives*'.

However, when asked about putting the teaching of human rights into practice, the vast majority of respondents to this question intended to incorporate human rights into their teaching, providing a huge range of potential contexts, from circle time discussions to subject-specific learning such as in drama or poetry, with some interpreting human rights as something '*out there in the world*' and others providing examples of how human rights could be used to impact on the daily lives of children within the school. Although the question asked about intentions, some of the answers demonstrated work already done, highlighting a potential contradiction between fears of teaching human rights in theory, and implementation in practice. One BACP respondent working with children under five years-old gave an example of her nursery's e-twinning project with two nurseries in Poland and

China: '*Through [the topic of] weather, we have discussed the hurricane and floods throughout the world and the impact this has on human rights*'. Another BACP student was clear that '*Children are taught at a very early age of their right and that of others to be heard and to be safe [and suggested] this could be formalised and perhaps explored in a talking and thinking floorbook*'.

Indeed, it is worth noting that the scope of topics proposed and the idea that this meant that one was '*being fair and inclusive in my teaching style and classroom ethos*' betrayed the contradiction between lack of knowledge, lack of confidence and the non-implementation of HRE in students' classrooms. One possible explanation might be that students articulated on many occasions that they were not sure what constituted a human rights topic. Indeed, there is an obligation on teachers under *Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive, 2004), that children are to engage with the world around them as 'responsible citizens'. The curricular guidelines clearly state that:

> *Curriculum for Excellence is underpinned by the values of wisdom, compassion, integrity and justice. Within this, education for citizenship provides learners with the opportunity to develop an understanding of fairness and justice, equips them with skills of critical evaluation and encourages the expression of attitudes and beliefs to respond to the challenges we face as global citizens in a constructive and positive manner* (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2011).

As a consequence, teachers cannot and should not be able to dodge the teaching of human rights. Moreover, *Curriculum for Excellence* expounds a child-centred approach to teaching and learning and this, according to Bajaj (2011a) would be highly appropriate in HRE,

'respecting the child's role as constructor of knowledge rather than treating her as a passive recipient of information' (p. 501).

Despite professed fears on the part of the students, they need to come to grips with what constitutes a human rights topic and a human rights approach to their pedagogy. While most respondents were able to list at least one human rights issue or topic, some failed fully to recognise one as such or to identify the human rights issues inherent in general topics taught in the primary classroom. For instance, during one of the interviews there was a discussion about children learning about Victorians. One of the interviewers suggested that there was a good link between child labour in the Victorian era in Britain and child labour in the world today. This suggestion had not occurred to the students but they recognised the link and appreciated that this might be an easy way into teaching about an aspect of human rights. This is perhaps allied to the earlier point that students thought that they would need to learn a lot about human rights at their own level but also that they were nervous of the age appropriateness of certain topics. One student explained that she would enthusiastically tackle the topics of sectarianism and domestic abuse *'because I feel passionate about these things, but I would be frightened to know where's my boundaries… where do you draw the line?'* Indeed, the BACP students' responses surprised the BEd1 and PGDE students when the researchers suggested that there was much HRE underway in the early years context.

In contrast, BEd4 and BACP students, with more experience of teaching human rights issues on placement, did not see judging age-appropriateness as the biggest barrier. This suggests that classroom experience may make a difference to students' confidence in this area. However, while the BEd4 students demonstrated a confidence in teaching human rights not

present for BEd1 or PGDE students, their school placement experiences enabled them to see different barriers to teaching human rights, for example resistance within the system.

One student had planned an integrated topic to introduce human rights issues to a primary five class (aged 9) but her supervising teacher consulted a colleague and decided that it was '*a bit controversial*' and despite the student having assured the class teacher that she knew what she was doing, the discussion between the two colleagues led to the student undertaking a 'non-controversial' topic. The student stated that she '*may have shied away from it [HRE] until I realised – after the Holocaust Memorial Day – just how easily the children were able to talk about it*'. The potentially 'blocking' role of other teachers was reinforced in the online survey responses in answers to an open question on barriers to teaching human rights. Some students suggested that a lack of resources may be a problem, but a greater number of students were more scathing and posited that some teachers think that it is more important teaching children '*what is required to have them [children] 'fit in' to the workplace*'. It is ironic that even in the student's response in relation to the workplace, there is no notion that human rights may be important in the workplace.

Further, students identified barriers around the tensions, prioritising curriculum content over HRE. It is perhaps worth noting that, while the students are well-versed in Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), they, in the majority of cases, failed to make very strong links between CfE and human rights education. The students also identified a lack of creativity in how subjects might be taught that linked to human rights but that the overarching driver of responsible citizenship in CfE might be a useful hook on which to hang HRE. A small minority articulated an understanding of the relationship between human rights and the CfE at a deeper level, both its role in supporting teaching and learning and its role in preparing

pupils for wider societal participation. Comments in the online survey from this minority of students are typified by the following statements:

As a teacher I wish to enter a partnership with pupils not a dictatorship. They need to be aware of their rights and how to confidently embrace and act within those rights, developing an understanding of the importance of their and others' rights.

Curriculum for Excellence provides practitioners with a framework for promoting children's rights. As an early years practitioner I consult with and listen to children, addressing their needs and interests in a developmentally appropriate manner. I believe that early years establishments are successful at promoting the rights of the child through their child-centred approach.

Note, however, that the language in the second example refers back to children's rights.

Both BACP students interviewed were currently managing nurseries and after school care projects in which human rights teaching took place. Unlike the BEd and PGDE students, they had engaged in discussion about teaching both children's rights and human rights in the past and were fully aware of the perceptions that commonly go with this as identified by other interviewees, but they had addressed these perceived barriers through their dialogue with colleagues. It is evident from the BACP responses that leadership can support class teachers or early years staff on implementing HRE. The key factor for staff in schools and early years settings appears to be through appropriate continuing professional development (CPD).

The BACP students highlighted that before embarking on any new initiative, CPD needs would demand consideration. The BACP interviewees were able to identify training and

development on the United Nations' website that they had found useful in working with their colleagues, and reported that this had gone some considerable way to alleviating the anxieties that staff had felt in terms of their own knowledge of human rights but of approaches and topics that might usefully be approached in their working context. Indeed, in the interviews with the BEd students it was suggested that some CPD opportunities might be offered as a consequence of this study. All students responded enthusiastically to this idea, recognising that they would perhaps feel more confident determining the appropriateness of topics for working with children at different stages as well as being given some content knowledge at their own level. This appears to be similar to most topics that student teachers are expected to teach; there are always anxieties around teaching generally as students acknowledge that they are still learning and that they are nervous of doing the wrong thing.

Conclusions

So, while, in this study, the early years setting appears to be doing better in terms of engaging with human rights teaching with very young children, this may be because those interviewed were managers of early years settings with the attendant experience and authority. Indeed, these interviewees were in a position to drive CPD where others may not. Some BEd and PGDE students were able to identify human rights topics or approaches but were crucially aware of their own lack of knowledge in the area of HRE. It is interesting that the BACP students recognised the need for CPD for themselves and sought to find this. The student teachers promoted the notion that HRE was the responsibility of staff on their courses and they, by and large, did not recognise their own responsibility in awareness raising or development. Certainly it is clear from the responses that on these students'

courses there is little evidence of HRE, either in terms of discussion of pedagogy or content, so this demands further consideration and action to ensure that obligations on the part of teacher educators are being met in order that initial teacher education students, and subsequently fully registered teachers, are equipped to engage with the ideas necessary to fulfil their obligations to the children they teach.

What this study suggests is that what is available to education students is input on children's rights. While this is laudable, it is important that students recognise that children's rights is a subset of the human rights discourse and that it is not adequate to hold a focus purely on children's rights. The UN's (2010) final evaluation explicitly states that with regard to HRE clear guidelines are lacking and that school staff do not have appropriate resources to tackle the area. Indeed, the report strongly asserts that

> *There continue to be challenges in national implementation. Among the commonly identified gaps are the absence of explicit policies and detailed implementation strategies for human rights education and the lack of systematic approaches to the production of materials, the training of teachers and the promotion of a learning environment which fosters human rights values* (p.20).

This makes it clear that schools are not doing enough, but that in order to ensure teachers engage with HRE fully (Bajaj, 2011b; Bromley, 2011), appropriate initial teacher education and continuing professional development for teachers needs to be in place where student teachers and fully qualified teachers learn about human rights in conjunction with a human rights curriculum (Chamberlain, 2001). This should include discussion of the human rights process element; of the importance of practice that reflects human rights values in action

(UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2001). There is certainly evidence of policies that are aligned with human rights values, in particular, in taking a rights-based approach. In Scotland the issue of children's voice is in evidence in legislation and practice. For instance, not only must all schools have active pupil councils, Section 6 of the Standards in Scotland's Schools, etc. Act (2000) clearly states that head teachers must demonstrate in their school development plans how they will consult with children when decisions have to be made about the day-to-day running of the school. This is not to say, though, that children's voices are always heard, but we need to beware of the dominance of the oft-cited issues about which children are consulted: school uniform, snacks at break-time and the toilet facilities available for children. Nor is it clear if teachers understand that such policies and practices might be relevant from a HRE perspective. This study suggests that a gap remains.

The issue, however, that is more difficult to address is that of anxiety around parents' attitudes and views, with one student articulating what several conveyed in their responses, that if human rights education is taught then '*all hell will break loose*'. Practising teachers have much experience of working with and reporting to parents; student teachers, however, do not. So, it may be that with experience current students will become more confident in teaching human rights because they are more used to teaching and justifying their educational decisions generally. Given the anecdotal evidence of students in this study, it is not sufficient to rely on this hope. If student teachers had meaningful and more overt input that addressed not only HRE content but also the associated pedagogy, they may be more confident in tackling these topics and the potential consequences of teaching such topics. Indeed, as the students were able to articulate links between HRE and *Curriculum for Excellence*, what is required is this articulation being taken further so that the students feel

they have 'permission' to engage in human rights topics and this will breed confidence.

Above all, what is perhaps needed in degree courses for those responsible for children's learning, if the findings of this study were to be replicated, is a more explicit dialogue with these students about their obligations and children's right to human rights education. This dialogue should also engage practising teachers, childhood practitioners and policy makers removed from Scottish classrooms. More importantly perhaps, is that children should be included, as 'The best way to safeguard and perpetuate democracy and human rights is to educate people at an early age to be democratic and to respect the rights of other people' (Gündoğu & Yildirim, 2010).

Notes

*BACP students are staff working in early years settings who study part-time. All staff in Scotland with management responsibility for children's services outwith the school sector, for example, pre-school, early years settings, after school clubs, and the like, are governed by the Scottish Social Services Council Framework's Standard for Childhood Practice (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2007) and this demands that they are qualified to degree level.

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