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CURRICULUM & TEACHING STUDIES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Teaching and learning children's human rights: A research synthesis

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Abstract: The study presented in this paper is a research synthesis examining how issues relating to the teaching and learning of children's human rights have been approached in educational research. Drawing theoretically on the European Didaktik tradition, the purpose of the paper is to map and synthesise the educational interest in children's rights research. The paper identifies the motives, content and processes of education for human rights suggested in research. The chosen publications are analysed in three steps, based on three didactic questions: what, how and why. Six educational categories in the teaching and learning of children's human rights are identified: *involvement, agency, awareness, citizenship, respect for rights* and *social change*. In each category, the motives, educational content and processes are clarified. A conclusion is that even though the motives for rights education vary, the content and processes in the education are about *human relations* and *interaction*.

Subjects: Education; Educational Research; Curriculum Studies

Keywords: children's rights; human rights; education; Didaktik; didactics; teaching; learning

1. Introduction

In recent decades, human rights for children have been firmly placed on political and academic agendas. The role of education for advancing children's human rights has received increasing

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The authors are experienced researchers in the fields of curriculum studies and children's human rights in education. The research synthesis here presented is part of a three-year research project, funded by the Swedish Research Council, examining what and how children and young people learn about their human rights.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Despite the education about human rights carried out in schools worldwide, human rights violations continue to be a problem in all parts of the world. This paper presents results from a research project that investigates education in and about human rights. There is very little research that has systematically examined the rationale behind teaching and learning about human rights and the actual content of the education being carried out—or in other words why we teach about rights, with what content and how we do it. In the paper we present different views on teaching and learning children's human rights, and thereby we clarify how the motives, the content and the processes suggested for this education differ. This more detailed understanding of educational processes surrounding education for human rights can contribute to teachers' work with children and young people in practice, and also to further research into these matters.

attention in policies and research, internationally and within nations. Aiming to bring current knowledge about the education of children in and about rights together, this paper examines how issues of *teaching and learning of children's human rights* have been approached in educational research. Specifically the paper examines how earlier research discusses *what* is learned, *how* it is done and with what *purposes (why)*.

Education is established as a right in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and in other rights instruments (e.g. Council of Europe, 1950; United Nations, 1966b). Access to and receiving education are central rights aspects of education. Equally important elements of the right to education are the aims and role of education to respect and develop children's and young people's abilities to enjoy and enact other rights. In short, education is not only itself a human right of the child, it is also an important vehicle for a wider and fuller achievement of all human rights (Grover, 2002).

Educational children's rights research is a small research field and the work that has been undertaken has contributed important knowledge about rights issues in educational contexts. To a large extent the research so far undertaken has focused on the responsibility of education to *respect* children as holders of rights, for example by listening to children and taking their views into account (I'Anson & Allan, 2006; Theobald & Danby, 2011). The responsibility of education to *educate* children and young people as holders of human rights has not been given the same attention in research (Quennerstedt, 2015). This means that matters that lie at the heart of educational thinking—the *content(s)* of the teaching and learning and the *processes* with which this is undertaken—have not been much addressed in scholarly children's right work within education. This paper seeks to make a contribution towards addressing these issues by collating and examining research that has so far been undertaken. The specific purpose is to *identify the motives, content and processes of teaching and learning human rights* that are expressed in research and to map and synthesise these.

The examination of the research field was undertaken within the European Didaktik tradition. This educational tradition focuses on the key elements of education: the educational content and the educational processes. The conceptual framework of the Didaktik tradition provided us with analytical tools to determine how the content and processes of teaching and learning of human rights is addressed in the analysed research.

When approaching research that addresses children as holders of rights, an important matter to take into account is the different understandings of how human rights relate to children. This matter suffers from a lack of clarity in both policy and academic work. Some children's rights researchers argue that "children's rights" have to be viewed as part of the broader human rights framework (Alderson, 1999; Bennet & Hart, 2001). This reasoning is explicitly supported by some human rights theorist, for example Bobbio (1996) who describes children's rights as being a step in the expansion of human rights. Other authors within the field of children's rights make no reference at all to human rights in their work, and instead discuss "rights for children" as being a separate entity than the general human rights.

There are also varying views as to whether *the rights* that children have differ from the general rights of humans, or whether they are the same. One expression of the idea that children's rights is a separate set of rights can be found in the vocabulary often used to describe and discuss children's rights. In children's rights research, rights categories for children are frequently conceptualised as "provision", "protection" and "participation" rights (Quennerstedt, 2010). In comparison, human rights are often categorised as "civil", "political" and "economic, social and cultural rights" (UN, 1966a, 1966b). Depending on the vocabulary used in research that addresses rights for children, these are consequently either constructed as being separate from general human rights or as part of human rights.

In our examination of educational children's rights research, awareness about the different approaches and vocabularies informing studies that address the teaching and learning of rights is essential. First, the differing ideas about children's rights represented in the field need to be taken into account when searching and selecting publications for analysis. Second, important insights could be gained by reflecting the results of the research synthesis against the background of varying thinking about children's rights.

2. Theoretical framework: Didaktik–didactics

Didaktik has a long tradition in non-English speaking (northern) Europe. In general, Didaktik is defined as *the theory and praxis of teaching and learning* and addresses issues of content and processes in education. Didaktik focuses on one or several of the key elements of education, such as the content, the teacher and/or the student and/or the relationships between them. These elements form an educational situation and are the principal objects of Didaktik (e.g. Gundem, 2011; Uljens, 1997).

In several European countries Didaktik is recognised as an academic discipline and the professional science of teachers and has a similar role as, for example, medicine for physicians (Wickman, 2014). In other regions, for example in English-speaking nations, the use of Didaktik theory is limited (Hudson & Meyer, 2011). The kind of educational questions dealt with in the Didaktik-tradition are in English language more discussed in terms of teaching and learning, curriculum and curriculum theory.

Despite the differences in traditions and language use, a dialogue is continuing between the Anglo-American curriculum research tradition and the European-Continental Didaktik tradition (e.g. Gundem, 1998; Gundem & Hopmann, 1998; Hopmann, 2007; Hopmann & Riquarts, 1995; Hudson, 2007; Hudson & Meyer, 2011; cf. Popkewitz, 1997; Westbury, 1995). One example of the meeting of the two traditions is Shulman's (1986, 1987) well-known model of teachers' transformation of educational content into *pedagogical content knowledge*, which like Didaktik focuses on content and the transformation of content (cf. Kansanen, 2011). Other examples, here of how curriculum theory has influenced Didaktik, are Roberts (1982) *curriculum emphases* on different knowledge interests in science education (cf. Roberts & Östman, 1998) and Englund's historical *conceptions* of citizenship education (1986). There are also examples of crossing interests in the intersection between Didaktik and educational theory, for example in the work of John Dewey (e.g. Englund, 2016; Stone, 2016).

The Didaktik tradition offers fruitful theoretical concepts and tools for the study of education. Hudson (2003) argues that, concerning the relevance and potential of the ideas associated with Didaktik, he "agree[s] with Westbury [2000] in emphasising that Didaktik provides ways of thinking that highlight very important universal educational questions that are not well-articulated in the English-language curriculum tradition" (Hudson, 2003, p. 176). In other words, Didaktik theory offers a language with which to systematically engage and talk about teaching and learning (Uljens, 1997, p. 166).

In the past decade, the use of the English word *didactics* (for Didaktik) has increased in research contexts. In the English language *didactics* or *didactic* often has a different interpretation and a more negative connotation, which means that it could be misunderstood as teaching in a negative way (cf. Wickman, 2014). However, in order to engage with other Didaktik researchers, from now on the word *didactics* rather than Didaktik will be used in the paper.¹

2.1. The didactic analysis

One of the basic concepts in the Didaktik-tradition is *the didactic triangle* (Hopmann, 1997; Hudson & Meyer, 2011; Klette, 2007). The origin of the triangle is unclear, but Hopmann (1997, p. 201) suggests that it can be found already in Comenius "Didactica Magna". The triangle encompasses the fundamental elements in all educational situations: the content, the teacher and the student and the relationships between these, which makes it a useful instrument for educational planning and analysis (e.g. Hudson & Meyer, 2011; Uljens, 1997).

Related to the triangle are the three so-called *didactic questions*: what, how and why. The first question “what?” addresses the content used in the educational situation. The second question “how” concerns the processes and the form for education and the third question “why?” focuses on the motives for the selection of content and processes. The German educational theorist Klafki developed the questions into what he called *Didaktische Analyse* (Klafki, 1963/1995)–didactic analysis. In Klafki’s analysis the educational content was in focus.² Later, more concrete methods for didactic analyses of educational situations have been developed, particularly in the literature of practice oriented teacher education (e.g. Lindström & Pennlert, 2013). In this paper the didactic questions are used as the analytical tool with which we identify, map and synthesise the educational interest in educational children’s human rights research.

3. Methodology

The study presented in this paper is a research synthesis. The term *meta-analysis* is often used for such examinations, sometimes alongside and synonymously with the term *synthesis* (Cornelius-White, 2007). Other scholars (Andrews & Harlen, 2006; Marston & King, 2006) maintain that a better term for meta-research dealing with qualitative data is *systematic review*. However, Greenhalgh et al. (2005) highlight that the word “review” can be misleading, because it could be perceived as a summary of the literature. What is common to all the above-mentioned scholars is that they use the term *synthesis* to qualify what a systematic review is about. In this paper, we draw on these authors and use the term *research synthesis*, or sometimes just *synthesis*, for our analysis.

A research synthesis combines separate studies and analyses them as a whole with a view to producing knowledge that reaches beyond the sum of the parts (Campbell et al., 2003; Greenhalgh et al., 2005). In line with this, our analysis combined and integrated individual studies in order to bring themes and concepts together. A research synthesis also involves conceptual innovation, in the sense of employing new ways of conceptualising the research field (cf. Quennerstedt, 2011). Following such an ambition, we sought to display our findings in new ways of wording the qualitative essences.

Marston and King (2006) maintain that no particular given method for analysing and synthesising qualitative research exists. The methods used for doing qualitative research syntheses are accordingly overall the same as in other qualitative research, and differs mainly depending on what question the synthesis aims at answering. Moreover, they argue formulation of research questions and choice of research methods are closely related to the theoretical perspective on which the synthesis builds. In our synthesis, the didactic analysis, as presented above, guided the analytical reading of the selected research. How this was done is described in the following.

3.1. Data selection and analysis

The data was selected systematically. First, an extensive search was conducted in order to identify publications dealing with education for children’s human rights. The databases EBSCO, ERIC and the International Journal of Children’s Rights were searched using the following words in various combinations: *children’s rights, human rights, education, teaching, learning, curriculum, curriculum studies, curriculum research, curriculum theory, pedagogy, socialisation, knowledge, content, content analysis, discourse, discourse analysis, critical and didactics*. The period searched was 1990–2015. The adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) formed the main starting point for academic work on children’s rights, and we wanted to cover the work undertaken since then. We accordingly chose a quite long period and thereby to include older research. A risk with this is that the result might give an outdated picture, not taking changes in research over time into account. Of the finally selected 28 publications, however, 21 are published during the last ten years and only two before 2000. We therefore conclude that the synthesis gives an up to date picture of the research we aim to examine, but we can also be confident that the matter we wish to investigate was not dealt with in the early children’s rights research.

In the search, only publications dealing generally with the teaching and learning of rights within early childhood education or formal education were selected. This means that abstracts indicating an interest in a specific issue, such as bullying, indigenous groups or disabilities, and interest in other age groups, were not included in the study. The search resulted in 111 potentially relevant publications.

The 111 abstracts were screened by applying the three didactic questions to the text. The abstracts were searched for indications of:

- (1) *motives* for educating children about human rights (why?)
- (2) educational *content* related to human rights or children's rights (what?)
- (3) *processes* (methods) for how to educate children in human rights (how?)

In the reading of abstracts we wanted to identify publications that addressed educational content or teaching and learning processes. Due to the restricted format of abstracts, this screening was not based on strict criteria for inclusion, but rather done in a highly allowing way, and all publications signalling *any* kind of attention to motives, content or processes of the teaching and learning of children's human rights were included. These were of different character—empirical, conceptual or theoretical. The screening of abstracts identified 57 publications as potentially relevant, and those were retrieved and read in full.

In the reading of the full texts, the elements of the didactic analysis formed a stricter criterion of inclusion: *the publication must demonstrate a clear attention to motives, content or processes in teaching and learning children's human rights*. A number of publications addressed these matters in a marginal way, and 29 of the publications were excluded for not meeting the criterion of inclusion. Altogether, 28 publications were finally selected for analysis (see the Analysed publications).

The didactic questions formed, as earlier described, the tool for the subsequent analysis, which was conducted in three steps:

- (1) In the first step, the didactic questions were systematically posed to each study:
 - (a) *Why* are children to be educated about, for and in human rights? The answers to this question displayed *motives* indicated in the publication for teaching and learning children's human rights.
 - (b) *What* is the education to be about? The answers to this question identified educational *content* in teaching and learning of rights suggested in each publication?
 - (c) *How* is the education to be carried out? The answers to this question clarified suggested *processes* for teaching and learning of rights.

This step of the analysis investigated the educational situations described in each publication, which resulted in condensed descriptions of the motives for (why), the content of (what) and the processes in (how) teaching and learning of rights suggested in each publication.

- (2) The second analytical step aimed to synthesise the results in step one. This was done by bringing together the condensed descriptions for each element of the didactic analysis (motives, content, processes), and searching for similarities and differences in meaning within each of these. After a step-by-step identification of patterns, a number of themes were constructed which clarified qualitative differences within, respectively, motives, content and processes.

At this point, the motives for teaching and learning of rights were chosen to form the baseline for the synthesis, and to be the structuring principle for the continuing analysis. Six qualitatively different themes were constructed within the motives-element.

- (3) The third step in the analysis was to connect the publications' suggested *content* and *processes* in the teaching and learning of rights to the six motives. In this final part of the analysis, the motive, content and processes accordingly formed a unity that displayed the indicated content and processes in teaching and learning children's human rights with a certain motive in sight. We called these six unities *educational categories of teaching and learning children's human rights*. The educational categories are the main result of the analysis.

4. Findings

The findings are presented as follows. First, a brief introduction is given as to how teaching and learning is articulated in the publications. This is followed by an elaboration of the six educational categories of the teaching and learning of children's human rights. Quotations from the analysed publications are given to support the interpretations and to provide a more robust context. A summary of the findings is given in Table 1.

4.1. The articulation of teaching and learning rights in analysed publications

Discussions about teaching and learning of rights are rarely present throughout the analysed publication but are rather articulated in some parts of the texts. Moreover, the motives, content and processes are seldom approached in the publications as separate entities, instead, rights education is often described as a whole, or as an activity. The following example is characteristic for how rights education is discussed in the publications:

Table 1. Educational categories of the teaching and learning of children's human rights

Main motive	Educational content	Educational processes
1. Involvement		
Develop self-esteem (right to be involved) and interactional capacity	Involvement	Recognition of child's capacity
	Interpersonal relations	Everyday interactions:
		Responsive intersubjectivity
		Social interaction
2. Agency		
Develop capacity for action in one's own life	Empowerment	Active engagement with others
	Joint action	Altruism, unselfishness
3. Awareness		
Develop awareness about the rights, and ability to protect and enjoy them	Knowledge about (children's) human rights	Knowledge acquisition through information
		Learning through experience
4. Citizenship		
Prepare for participatory democratic citizenship	Participation	Democratic teaching
	Decision-making	Include children's views, voices and experiences
	Rights-based relations	
5. Respect for rights		
Develop good social relations and good behaviour	Rights-based relations: rights, respect and responsibility—the social contract	Peer interaction: learning together
		Democratic teaching
6. Social change		
Develop capacity to change social structures: increase social justice and equity	Power relations	Analyse power structures
	Empowerment	Peer interaction
	Social action	Activism
Emancipatory attitude		

Literary books recommended for children should not have a content that abuses children and violates their rights; on the contrary, the contents of such books should make the children sense the rights they have and inform them about their own rights. It would be useful to have a commission that consists of field experts perform this preliminary review. Particularly the books to be found in this list should be selected from among the works of contemporary writers that are responsive to children's rights. In a more general expression, even if these books should belong to the past literature periods, it should be taken into account whether various variables, mainly children's rights, are presented in accordance with the requirements of modern life. (Karaman-Kepekci, 2010, p. 79)

We also note that none of the 28 publications state an aim of the research that is explicitly directed to motives for, content or processes in the teaching and learning of human rights. The purpose of the research may be expressed as follows:

This study was designed to examine the impact of teaching children's rights as a means of promoting rights respecting attitudes. (Covell & Howe, 2001, p. 29)

[...] this article will discuss a variety of issues addressing this topic [child philanthropy] and conclude by offering some practical considerations. (Armstrong, 2011, p. 43)

The knowledge interest articulated in the research aims could accordingly rarely be said to express an interest in line with the didactic analysis. In spite of this, matters of content, processes and motives of teaching and learning rights are frequently dealt with in the publications, and attention to such matters could be identified through the analytical procedure elaborated above.

4.2. The teaching and learning of human rights—six educational categories

The following educational categories were formed in the analysis. In each category, the motive for educating children in and about rights, the content in and processes for teaching and learning of rights take a specific form: (1) *involvement*, (2) *agency*, (3) *awareness*, (4) *citizenship*, (5) *respect for rights* and (6) *social change*. The first two categories solely refer to early childhood education (up to eight years of age) and the last four mainly to the teaching and learning of rights for schoolchildren.

4.2.1. Involvement

The main *motive* for the teaching and learning of rights in this first educational category is involvement. The educational situation is early childhood education, and the discussions mainly deal with how to interact with children and how to meet children's participation rights. The child has a right to be involved and should develop interactional capacity (Armstrong, 2011; Bae, 2009; Johansson, 2005; Sandberg & Årlemalm-Hagsér, 2011; Smith, 2007; Theobald, Ailwood, & Danby, 2011).

Participation is an interactional process that involves managing relationships between children and adults. (Theobald et al., 2011, p. 19)

My point of departure is that everyday interactions and communications with the staff influence the realisation of children's participatory rights. (Bae, 2009, p. 394)

This should be enacted in all daily activities with two *content* foci. The first one stresses that children's perspectives should be taken into account in all activities (Armstrong, 2011; Bae, 2009; Johansson, 2005; Sandberg & Årlemalm-Hagsér, 2011; Smith, 2007; Theobald et al., 2011).

To contextualise the discussion, the article starts with a reference to Norwegian documents, and highlight statements that point to how children should be respected regarding their right to express themselves and take part on their own terms. (Bae, 2009, p. 392)

[...] children [should] have the right to be involved and to be heard in matters that affect them [...]. (Sandberg & Årlemalm-Hagsér, 2011, p. 46)

The second content focus emphasises interpersonal relations, such as the relationship to other people. Children should learn that they are mutually dependent on each other (Bae, 2009; Johansson, 2005; Sandberg & Årlemalm-Hagsér, 2011).

A central tenant in this theoretical framework is that self reflection, including being able to see oneself from the perspective of the other, is necessary in mediating mutual recognition. (Bae, 2009, p. 397)

A fundamental assumption underlying the discussion is that people are mutually dependant on each other [Merleau-Ponty, 1962]. Identity [...] grows in the interaction with others. (Johansson, 2005, p. 112)

As the child gets older, activities that focus on social relations increase (Armstrong, 2011; Smith, 2007; Theobald et al., 2011).

The teaching and learning *processes* highlight recognition and everyday interactions. Teachers should work in accordance with children's ways of thinking (inter-subjectivity) so that they are respected and acknowledged. Children's influence and voices are emphasised, as are their experiences and intentions. Listening to children in their daily activities and communications is a central part of the educational process (Armstrong, 2011; Bae, 2009; Johansson, 2005; Sandberg & Årlemalm-Hagsér, 2011; Smith, 2007; Theobald et al., 2011).

[...] education is to consider the child's perspective, give children a voice, listen to them and take them seriously'. Seeing the child as competent enough to express her or his meaning is very important in allowing mutual recognition and respect between professionals and children. [Bae, 2004] (Sandberg & Årlemalm-Hagsér, 2011, p. 46)

Children should have a say in matters that affect them. (Theobald et al., 2011, p. 20)

It is also suggested that children should learn to respect others and their views, to work with other children and negotiate in democratic processes (Bae, 2009; Johansson, 2005; Sandberg & Årlemalm-Hagsér, 2011).

Democratic upbringing [...] is a question of empowering children to appreciate and tolerate differences in viewpoints and to develop a willingness to work together despite these differences. [Archard, 1993] (Johansson, 2005, p. 122)

Maybe a term such as "democratic moments" might capture what happens when staff in kindergartens allow space for small children's participation and freedom of expression (Bae, 2009, p. 395)?

The publications emphasise social processes in a child's everyday social context as crucial for learning to participate, especially as the child grows older (Armstrong, 2011; Smith, 2007; Theobald et al., 2011).

4.2.2. Agency

The main *motive* in the second educational category, also related to only to early childhood education, is to develop children's agency and capacity for action. Children are seen as agents in their own lives and as responsible participants in society.

Participation rights support a sense of belonging and inclusion but more importantly teach children how they can bring about change. (Smith, 2007, p. 149)

Relating to, respecting, caring for and functioning with others is a complex process [...]. Their ability to consider another's perspective [...] illustrates their ability to be altruistic versus predominantly egocentric. (Armstrong, 2011, p. 45)

The *content* is oriented towards empowerment and joint actions (Armstrong, 2011; Smith, 2007).

Two key components of children's rights to participation are empowerment and respect. (Armstrong, 2011, p. 45)

Joint involvement with others [...] is likely to contribute to effective participation. (Smith, 2007, p. 154)

This is enacted in *processes* that focus on active engagement with others in order to make a difference (for the other).

Joint involvement with others in challenging learning activities, feeling comfortable, accepted and tuned in to the other participants in a group (and group members being sensitive to you), is likely to contribute to effective participation. (Smith, 2007, p. 154)

One approach is to develop an altruistic attitude. Here children are educated to act responsibly towards other humans in an unselfish and philanthropic manner.

The ability to give selflessly for the welfare of others stems from the ability to be socially oriented—that is, to care about others, to be able to consider perspectives other than one's own, and to have the desire to engage with others. (Armstrong, 2011, p. 44)

Another way is to engage children in so-called learning stories where children communicate about their learning conditions with for example parents. This enables children to be active participants in their own learning: "Such a model encourages children to be active citizens" (Smith, 2007, p. 157).

4.2.3. Awareness

The main *motive* for the teaching and learning of rights in the third educational category is to make schoolchildren aware of their rights, and in that way create a human rights culture (Akengin, 2008; Batur Musaoglu & Haktanir, 2012; Clair, Miske, & Patel, 2012; Eckmann, 2010; Gwirayi & Shumba, 2011; Karaman-Kepeneci, 2010 and also Polak, 2010).

So, education must begin in early childhood to create a human right culture in society. (Batur Musaoglu & Haktanir, 2012, p. 3286)

These clubs aim to spread a culture of human rights, to provide broad knowledge on rights, but also reflection on how to defend them and become active citizens. (Polak, 2010, p. 53)

Knowledge about the Convention on the Rights of the Child, or human rights more generally, is emphasised as a central *content* in rights education. Also, awareness about children's behaviour, abilities, relations and actions are all regarded as relevant educational content.

The starting point is whether children know their rights, however. (Gwirayi & Shumba, 2011)

Children's rights constitute one of the important parts of the human rights education. (Akengin, 2008, p. 225)

However, the children's rights set out in the Convention cannot exist unless they are transformed into a behaviour. And undoubtedly, this is only possible through education. [DCA, 1998] (Akengin, 2008, p. 226)

The teaching and learning *processes* focus on how to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The key theme is knowledge acquisition, primarily by informing children about (their) rights, but also learning through experience and peer education.

Education on the rights of the child is an education to raise sensitivity towards children's rights, starting by introducing CRC in an environment in which the rights of the children are implemented and respected. (Batur Musaoglu & Haktanir, 2012, pp. 3288–3289)

[...] works of children's literature which are anti-authoritarian and in which children's rights are not violated can be made use of in human rights and children's rights education since children's literature is a useful tool for value and moral education, centering around concepts of fairness, human welfare and human rights. (Karaman-Kepeneci, 2010, p. 66)

Beyond that, workshops on the Convention on the Rights of the Child with role-play of rights violations in school situations (Clair et al., 2012), Holocaust education (Eckmann, 2010; Polak, 2010) or human rights clubs (Polak, 2010) are mentioned. Although the suggested processes (methods) for teaching children about (their) rights differ, their primary function is to raise awareness about rights.

4.2.4. Citizenship

The main *motive* for the teaching and learning of rights in the fourth educational category is to prepare for participatory democratic citizenship. Human rights, or children's human rights, are presented as globally agreed principles for living together and as the basis for citizenship.

A large part of the justification for this participation is in fact instrumental, the experience of involvement in decision-making being seen as an opportunity to develop knowledge, skills and values relating to subsequent democratic citizenship. (McCowan, 2012, p. 74)

The revised curriculum aims to “empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives’ with the specific objectives to develop the person as an individual, as a contributor to society and as a contributor to the economy and the environment. [Education [NI] Order 2007] (McEvoy & Lundy, 2007, p. 307)

The *content* focuses on participation and democratic decision-making in school, rights-based relations and the development of a school ethos permeated with rights thinking. The ambition is that children should develop a deeply rooted understanding of rights in all respects (McCowan, 2012; McEvoy & Lundy, 2007; Mitchell, 2010; Osler, 2013; Osler & Starkey, 1998).

[...] children's engagement in policy development [is] developed on the two key elements of Article 12: (a) children's rights to express their views and (b) children's right to have their view given due weight. (McEvoy & Lundy, 2007, p. 308)

Schools clearly have a key role to play in the process of dissemination. They can do this not only by educating children about their rights, as part of the formal school curriculum, but also by establishing themselves as model human rights communities which reflect the principles of the Convention and other key human rights instruments. (Osler & Starkey, 1998, p. 313)

Children's participatory citizenship is occasionally taken further, to settings outside the school, for example pupil involvement in *real* political decision-making as in this case participation in e-consultation (McEvoy & Lundy, 2007).

This rights-based citizenship education underlines democratic teaching and learning *processes* in which children's views, voices and experiences are included (McCowan, 2012; McEvoy & Lundy, 2007; Mitchell, 2010; Osler, 2013; Osler & Starkey, 1998).

Rights principles are expected to inform everyday processes of schooling. Learning about rights is in itself seen as an expression of human rights, in that the learning about and manifestation of human rights are fused.

Education in human rights cannot just be intellectual or cognitive, there is an important emotional or affective dimension to the learning. (Osler & Starkey, 1998, p. 316)

Learning to participate can also take place by actively engaging the children in meaningful actions, for example policy-making processes (McEvoy & Lundy, 2007).

[...] the development of effective e-consultation mechanisms from a right-based perspective. (McEvoy & Lundy, 2007, p. 306)

In this category of teaching and learning of rights, political engagement and the possibility to learn what citizenship based on rights means are central aspects.

4.2.5. *Respect for rights*

The main *motive* for the teaching and learning of rights in this fifth educational category is respect for rights, and the education aims towards developing good social relations and good behaviour on the basis of rights. The publications suggest that this can be accomplished by learning responsibilities and rights at the same time.

It is to show that although there is a conceptual linkage between rights and responsibilities, effective education requires that the central focus is on rights and that children be given the opportunity to discover for themselves the connection between rights and responsibilities. (Howe & Covell, 2010, p. 92)

The stress is on commonalities, on rights as relating to all people. (Davies, 2010, p. 464)

The *content* of rights education centres on the social contract and rights-based relations, particularly in terms of respecting and upholding the rights of others. Children learn that they have rights, which at the same time makes them more aware and supportive of the rights of others.

When viewed as a group value system or a social contract the important relationship between rights and responsibility is highlighted. (Wallberg & Kahn, 2011, p. 33)

When children learn that they are worthy individuals who possess rights, they become more supportive of rights for others. In essence, the data suggest what may be called a 'contagion effect' in which support for children's rights generalizes to other rights. [Covell & Howe, 1999] (Covell, O'Leary, & Howe, 2002, p. 304)

In other words, basic rights correlate with duties/responsibilities and upholding rights is therefore an effective code of behaviour. The publications argue that when rights are emphasised, rules are not necessary (Covell & Howe, 1999, 2001; Covell et al., 2002; Covell, Howe, & McNeil, 2010; Davies, 2010; Howe & Covell, 2009, 2010; Wallberg & Kahn, 2011).

Rights are also seen as an effective means for conflict prevention and for combating rights violations and child abuse (Davies, 2010).

The suggested teaching and learning *processes* in this category align with a rights-consistent pedagogy primarily based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Learning together with other children is essential, and peer interaction is a key theme. An emphasis is placed on participatory classrooms with democratic teaching styles and egalitarian teacher models, all of which imply cooperative learning, experience, everyday practice, talk and action. The idea is to infuse all educational

activities with rights thinking—a rights curriculum (Covell & Howe, 1999, 2001; Covell et al., 2002, 2010; Davies, 2010; Howe & Covell, 2009, 2010).

The curricula that have been used involve critical thinking skills, positive peer interaction, and a democratic style of teaching in which the teacher models the rights that the students are learning about. Rights are taught through a variety of group activities, through participatory learning, and through critical discussions and debate. Students are encouraged to express opinions, to challenge ideas, and to explore values in an egalitarian and open manner. (Covell et al., 2002, p. 304)

My hypothesis is that it will be the dialogic, interactive, almost combative nature of HRE that will prove the most effective. (Davies, 2010, p. 470)

It is also suggested that controversial issues can be dealt with by learning to interact using non-violent arguments (Davies, 2010).

4.2.6. *Social change*

The main *motive* for the teaching and learning of rights in the sixth and final educational category is the development of capacity to change social structures. Here, the overarching aims are increased equity and social justice, which are to be achieved by engaging children and young people in social issues (Frantzi, 2004; Mitchell, 2010; Nieto & Pang, 2005; Osler, 2013).

The overly academic treatment of human rights lacks action, hence, it does not challenge the status quo or social powers to act as agents of social change in larger society. (Frantzi, 2004, p. 3)

One of the major approaches [...] is to involve students in a decision-making process leading towards activism outside the classroom. (Nieto & Pang, 2005, p. 1)

The *content* focus is on empowerment and social action, and the educational interest is directed towards power relations, power structures and how to bring about social change (Frantzi, 2004; Mitchell, 2010; Nieto & Pang, 2005; Osler, 2013).

Human rights educational programs ought to educate students and adults about their rights and empower them to stand up for them, in order to take control of their own lives and the decisions that affect them. (Frantzi, 2004, p. 3)

Teachers for Justice, [...], seek to empower students to be decision-makers in their own lives and activists in the broader society. (Nieto & Pang, 2005, p. 12)

The teaching and learning *processes* are mainly based on cognitive as well as affective elements with an addition of critical pedagogies (Freire, Giroux and Dewey).

The approach is also congruent with calls for radicalizing citizenship education through 'new models of analysis' posited by critical pedagogues Giroux and Searls Giroux. [2004, p. 102] (Mitchell, 2010, p. 40)

Much attention is paid to ways of empowering students and how to teach students to engage with others. One suggested process for this is Dewey's concept of intelligent sympathy, where the idea is to care for yourself and the other person at the same time—a reciprocal (and critical) human rights pedagogy (Frantzi, 2004).

Relationships with peers start from being one-sided and egocentric to becoming more reciprocal and encompassing other's perspectives. An early human rights pedagogy can contribute to inhibiting students from adopting egocentric and ethnocentric views of rights upon other people. (Frantzi, 2004, p. 4)

A more activist-oriented proposal for how to empower children to become change agents in society at large is for them to learn from older children who are already champions of children's rights (Nieto & Pang, 2005). Human rights are further seen as a framework within which students can critically examine power and develop solidarity with others, both locally and globally (Osler, 2013).

The human rights project is based on recognition of the equal dignity of all people and on recognition of the global community as interconnected and interdependent. (Osler, 2013, p. 71)

Characteristics of this final category of teaching and learning of rights include a critical and emancipatory attitude and the questioning of the social status quo.

4.3. Summary

The educational categories of the teaching and learning of children's human rights identified in the analysed publications are summarised in Table 1.

5. Discussion

The aim of this paper has been to identify the motives, content and processes in the teaching and learning of human rights that are expressed in educational children's rights research and to map and synthesise them. Using the *motives* as a baseline in the analysis, six educational categories for the teaching and learning of children's human rights were formed in the synthesis: involvement, agency, awareness, citizenship, respect for rights and social change. The analysis in particular clarifies the varying ideas about why children and young people should learn about and for rights. Even though the publications are not altogether explicit about the content and processes of in teaching and learning about rights, light has also been shed on the content and how the learning is expected to happen.

With regard to the motives for educating children in and about rights, the analysis shows important differences relating to the ages of the children. The categories (1) *involvement* and (2) *agency* place the teaching and learning of rights in early childhood education in the somewhat narrow context of 'participation rights'. In these categories the main motives reflect a general preoccupation in children's rights research with children's participation, which has been highlighted by Reynaert, Bouverne-de Bie, and Vandeveldt (2009) and pointed out by Quennerstedt (2016) as particularly evident in early childhood education research. The analysis shows that the main idea articulated in research on young children's education in and about rights, is strengthening their participation. While the qualitative differences between the two motives are noteworthy, they both relate to the participation theme. The motives further display a children's rights perspective with a somewhat weak connection to the wider array of human rights (as mentioned in the introduction to this paper), in that references are only made to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The four educational categories that address the teaching and learning of rights for schoolchildren draw both on the general principles of human rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, more importantly, even though the participation theme is clearly present also in the school context, the motives cover a significantly wider range of knowledge and capacities than those for early childhood education. As expressed in the categories relating to school, children are expected to (3) *become aware of and learn about* rights in order to create a human rights culture, (4) live rights as a basis for *citizenship*, (5) *respect rights* as a code of behaviour and (6) critically examine power relations and thereby *act for social change*. The motives for educating older children transcend the participation theme and include the claim that knowledge *about* rights and learning to *respect* rights are keys to the successful realisation of human rights in our societies. In view of this, it is considered important that children are taught and learn about human rights at school.

The categories (1) *involvement* and (4) *citizenship* deal with the same aspect of children's participation-inclusion in daily discussions and decision-making-but are adapted to different age groups. The categories (2) *agency* and (6) *social change* relate to another aspect of

participation–empowerment and action and how to enable children to engage for social change–albeit with different motives, content and processes depending on age.

5.1. Human relations and interaction

With regard to the *educational content* that is suggested in the various educational categories, a recurring content theme is *the relationship to the other*. For younger children, the focus is on interpersonal relations between the teacher and the child. Young children’s relations to each other are also addressed as a rights-related learning content. For older children, relational aspects are discussed in terms of democratic relations, social relations, rights-based relations and power relations, thus indicating that, in different ways, the relationship to the other is a learning content.

When it comes to the *teaching and learning processes* suggested in the educational categories, *interaction* is emphasised as the main way of learning rights. This can be said to reflect the idea that children learn rights primarily by experiencing interactions that are informed by and infused with human rights. Such interaction is expected to occur in participatory classrooms with egalitarian teaching styles and cooperative learning pedagogy (peer education). Critical and activist-oriented processes are also suggested in one category. The pedagogy recommended for young children is one of listening (recognition) and interaction, and the pedagogies suggested for schoolchildren relate to inclusion and critical thinking.

Taken together, *how to engage with the other* is highlighted in the analysed research as essential for the teaching and learning of rights. With few exceptions, the teaching and learning of rights is transformed into a question of human relations from different perspectives, such as the inter-subjectivity between teacher and child, democratic relations, social relations, rights-based relations and power relations. All six educational categories for the teaching and learning of children’s human rights contain relational and interactive elements. It is noted that there are more differences between the motives than between the suggested content and processes.

5.2. A separation of younger and older children’s learning of rights

As indicated above, depending on the age of the children and the place in the education system (early childhood education or school), the motives (in particular) and the content and processes vary. In the analysed publications, the teaching and learning of rights in early childhood education is mostly framed and motivated by children’s ‘participation rights’, whereas for older children the teaching and learning of rights is more generally framed by international human rights legislation, and a wider range of motives for rights education are articulated in the analysed research. For younger children, the education is characterised by inter-subjectivity, while for older children the educational interest is more cognitive and social. In view of this, we think that the different ways of approaching rights education for young and older children and youth need to be further examined and discussed. It is clear that the teaching and learning of rights for younger and older children need different formats. At the same time, a development in which age becomes the main criterion in children’s learning in and about human rights would be problematical.

5.3. The didactic analysis—a tool to discern content and processes

The six categories for the teaching and learning of children’s human rights were formed from a synthesis of educational interests in the analysed publications, based on a didactic analysis. This begs the question as to whether the knowledge provided in earlier educational children’s human rights research addresses content and educational processes? Some of the analysed publications examine issues of learning (Eckmann, 2010; McEvoy & Lundy, 2007; Polak, 2010; Smith, 2007; Wallberg & Kahn, 2011). One author, Eckmann, discusses the learning processes and the content by using the didactic questions: “[...] why to teach about the Holocaust, what to teach about the Holocaust, and how to teach about the Holocaust” (2010, p. 9). A few other publications focus on learning goals related to rights. The answer to the above question is—not really. In general, the analysed publications do not set out to investigate content or processes in the teaching and learning of rights, but

have other purposes (cf. Reynaert et al., 2009; Quennerstedt, 2011). The plurality of meanings that were identified in this work were accordingly made possible by the use of didactic analysis.

It seems as though attention to educational content and processes in the teaching and learning of human rights in early childhood education and school is largely lacking. This constitutes a knowledge gap, which could also explain the somewhat vague findings in this synthesis with regard to the suggested ways of undertaking rights teaching and rights learning. The material for this study is research publications. Critics may claim that educational approaches focusing on content and processes can be found in more practice-oriented texts, and that a study that only investigates peer-reviewed research publications misses relevant material. However, this study asks how *research* has approached the motives, content and educational processes in the teaching and learning of rights. Moreover, with regard to the characteristics of the educational discussion suggested in the publications, it is doubtful whether the inclusion of practice-oriented texts would have affected the results.

5.4. Conclusions and going forward

In this paper, didactic analysis was the instrument used to identify the motives, content and processes in the teaching and learning of children's human rights. The didactic approach places epistemological issues and the question of knowledge in focus (cf. Englund, 1986; Roberts, 1982; Shulman, 1986, 1987) and asks questions like: Why should we teach and learn this? What should be learned? How should we teach and learn? What are the alternatives? The six educational categories that were identified give different answers to why rights should be taught and learned, and with what content and processes. Two main conclusions can be drawn. *First*, a significant disparity in the motives given for educating children of different ages about and in rights has been identified. For younger children, one motive theme is stated, which is that young children are to be educated in and about rights because they have a right to participation, in the sense of being involved and develop their agency. For older children, more motives are given as to why rights education should take place. These are that children are to be educated in and about rights because they need cognitive knowledge about rights and that they need to learn how to respect rights, both as a citizen and for social change. We argue that this separation of younger and older children's teaching and learning of rights needs further consideration in research. *Second*, the suggested content and processes for teaching and learning of rights are similar regardless of the motive. Rights education is largely transformed into a vague question of human relations and interactions. This constitutes a knowledge gap and indicates that further research is necessary.

Human rights are highly relevant in today's world. Education has a vital role to play if our societies are to uphold the principles enshrined in human rights. Teachers of early childhood education and schools have a responsibility to create and form an education in which children can grow as holders and practitioners of human rights. Questions about what an education for human rights should consist of, how it should be carried out and what the motives ought to be, are therefore of major importance for all teachers and for society as a whole. Our view is that more precise and deeper knowledge about the content and processes in the teaching and learning of rights is vital. Didactic thinking and analysis can provide valuable support for teachers in the planning and undertaking of rights education and for researchers examining such educational activities.

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Notes

1. In order to address the diversity and develop a common ground for didactic research, a European research network was established in 2006: *Didactics-Learning and Teach-*

- ing. The network's objective is: "the 're-invention of our didactic roots' on a European basis: 'Re-invention' because each and any research programme depends on creative investigation in relation to the field; and 'roots' because we can always integrate, in our re-constructions, the history of didactics which started in the 17th century with its great Czech founding father, John Amos Comenius" (<http://www.eera-ecer.de/networks/didactics/>, 7/5/2014).
2. Klafki (1963/1995) uses the terms *Bildungsinhalt* and *Bildungsgehalt* for two aspects of the content in his *Didaktische analyse* (cf. Shulman, 1986, 1987).
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