



This paper is taken from

*Human Rights and Citizenship Education
Proceedings of the eleventh Conference of the
Children's Identity and Citizenship in Europe
Academic Network*

London: CiCe 2009

edited by Peter Cunningham, published in London by CiCe, ISBN 978-0-9562789-6-8

Without explicit authorisation from CiCe (the copyright holder)

- only a single copy may be made by any individual or institution for the purposes of private study only
- multiple copies may be made only by
 - members of the CiCe Thematic Network Project or CiCe Association, or
 - a official of the European Commission
 - a member of the European parliament

If this paper is quoted or referred to it must always be acknowledged as

Rubinstein Reich, L. (2009) Developing Human Rights Didactics for Young Children in Teacher Education, in Ross, A. (ed) Human Rights and Citizenship Education. London: CiCe, pp 74 - 77

© CiCe 2009

CiCe
Institute for Policy Studies in Education
London Metropolitan University
166 – 220 Holloway Road
London N7 8DB
UK

This paper does not necessarily represent the views of the CiCe Network.



Lifelong Learning Programme

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Acknowledgements:

This is taken from the book that is a collection of papers given at the annual CiCe Conference indicated. The CiCe Steering Group and the editor would like to thank

- All those who contributed to the Conference
- The CiCe administrative team at London Metropolitan University
- London Metropolitan University, for financial and other support for the programme, conference and publication
- The Lifelong Learning Programme and the personnel of the Education and Culture DG of the European Commission for their support and encouragement.

Developing Human Rights Didactics for Young Children in Teacher Education

Lena Rubinstein Reich
University of Malm (Sweden)

Abstract

This presentation will elaborate on how student teachers can learn about and develop human rights didactics for young children. It will be based on the experiences gained from an ongoing study conducted by a group of teacher educators that use the research tradition of self study of teacher education practices. Their study focus one of the courses they teach within which student teachers conduct a study and write an essay on children's perspectives on social science subjects. The course is part of the main subject "Social Science Subjects and Children's Learning" at Teacher Education, Malmö University and is especially aimed at educating teachers for young children in subjects like history, geography, religion and social science.

Introduction

What is Human Rights Didactics in preschool and early years of primary school? What kind of content and what kind of processes should be in focus? How can student teachers learn about and develop Human Rights Didactics?

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (abbreviated CRC) was adopted by UN twenty years ago and although Sweden already in 1990 started to implement CRC in preschool and school, it is still an ongoing process. The implementation is a matter for all higher education, especially for professions like teacher education (Hägglund and Thelander, 2003).

Taking a self study approach (Loughran et al., 2004) from my own practice as a teacher educator as well as examples from my research as the point of departure the aim of this paper is to reflect on how student teachers learn and develop human rights didactics through CRC.

Three different ways to implement CRC will be presented and discussed. The first example is a group work assignment where student teachers study CRC and develop didactic suggestions for content in preschool and school. The second example presents a mentoring scheme where student teachers encounter a child on a one-to-one basis. The third example is an assignment where student teachers in an essay present a study of children's perspectives on specific subjects within the area of Social Sciences subjects.

Example 1 – Group work assignment – learning about CRC

A group assignment to study and suggest ideas for human rights didactics for children in preschool and primary school was part of a 15 ECTS course module in the fourth year of pre service teacher education. One group of student teachers that I as a teacher educator supervised decided to take the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, articles 31 and 32 as their point of departure and make suggestions for content and how to teach this in relation to goals in the Swedish National Curriculum. They came up with didactic suggestions for both preschool, primary school year 2-3 and primary school year 4-5. These suggestions were to teach about different conditions for children around the world when it comes to labour and leisure time, and to inform them about the Convention on the Rights of the Child. There were some recurrent didactical suggestions regardless of age-groups:

- Continuous references to the children's own experiences
- Learning through conversations with groups of children
- Using fiction literature and film
- Using drama and role-play

The aim was to make it possible for the children to connect what they heard or read to their own experiences and everyday life. This was suggested to happen through conversations that would help them reflect and thus learn about the CRC but also through teachers choosing subject content related to different living conditions for children around the world. Children's fiction in literature and film were suggested to be used along with, especially with preschool children, drama. One conclusion from this

example is that according to the students' group work implementing CRC is mainly to learn about the Convention and its different articles.

Example 2 – Student teachers as mentors – acting CRC

Näktergalen (the Nightingale) mentoring scheme presents a very different way to implement parts of CRC. The scheme started in 1997 at Malmö University, Sweden (Rubinstein Reich, 2001). University students, including student teachers, act as mentors on a personal one-to-one basis with a child aged 8 – 12. They meet two to three hours weekly during a period of eight months.

The aim of the mentoring scheme is to provide positive role models for the participating child. For the student teachers the aim is also to get an insight into a child's life, her/his family, how the child thinks about school and learning. Both children and mentors take part on a voluntary basis. The mentors are required to continuously document their work and regularly receive personal tutoring.

I conducted an evaluative study of the mentoring scheme three years after its initiation (Rubinstein Reich, 2001). The results indicate that student teachers view this as an implementation of CRC, as acting CRC and especially implementing article 12. Article 12 is the so called democracy-article where the child's right to express her or his own views freely, the right to be heard and be respected is clearly articulated. It is one of the four main principles in CRC.

Several of the basic prerequisites needed in order to implement article 12 (Bartley, 2001) are met due to the relationship that develops between mentor and child during their eight months long relationship. Mentor and child relate to each other as individuals, and develop subject-to-subject relationship. The child has space and an opportunity to be listened to, and to express her/his opinions. In the relationship the mentor acts as a grown-up who gives the child total attention, listens and tries to understand and interpret what the child says. There are quite rigorous frames and rules set up for the work as a mentor but paradoxically the strict frames give freedom and dynamics in the mentoring relationship. (Rubinstein Reich, 2003.)

Example 3 – Student teachers' essays – the child's-perspective

Another point of departure for the discussion of the implementation of CRC is to focus on the child's perspective. This is done in a 15 ECTS course module where student teachers write an essay and conduct an empirical study on young children's perspectives on Social Sciences subjects. The module is part of a course especially aimed at educating teachers for preschool and early years of primary school in subjects like History, Geography, Religion and Civics.

One of the learning outcomes for the module is that the student teachers should be able to study and explain the significance of taking the perspectives of children as a point of departure for didactics in Social Sciences subjects. The implementation of CRC in this example will give the student teachers an opportunity to reflect on content and subject to be taught related to a child-perspective, both in terms of teaching in the best interest of each child and in relation to the child's right to be heard, that is article 12.

Discussion

The three examples presented illustrate different possibilities and ways to implement and learn about CRC in teacher education. Some issues emerge concerning human rights didactics for preschool and early years in primary school in teacher education.

Knowledge about CRC, Childhood and Institution as context

In her thesis Englundh (2008) studied, at a regional level in Sweden, an organisation that had decided to implement CRC. Her results showed that learning about CRC was a prerequisite for implementation. This is also a prerequisite for student teachers. They too have to learn about CRC, understand and interpret its implications. It is especially important to focus on dilemmas and contradictions in the CRC with regard to constructions/conceptualisations, that is, the child as both dependent and independent, the child as an actor and as an object, including the concept of child-perspective (Hägglund and Thelander; 2003).

Except maybe for age, the student teachers' didactic suggestions in example 1, had no other considerations with regard to who the children were or in what environment. However, apart from

knowledge about the Convention in order to implement it, student teachers need to have a theoretical framework of concepts like *childhood* and *institution*.

Hägglund and Thelander (2008) suggest a theoretical framework based on sociological perspectives that could be useful for developing human rights didactics for young children. In this framework the child as dependent in two ways are in focus, relational dependency and a structural dependency where childhood/childhoods are considered as social categories.

Another aspect that needs to be taken into account and that I believe is important is the pre-school/school in which the CRC will be implemented. The relationship that developed between mentor and child in example 2, I would claim, was possible because it took place in an "institution-free" zone, outside preschool and school. Institutions like preschools and schools are usually physically enclosed locations, and have their own logic that influences the relation between children and teachers, how they relate to each other and how they communicate (Sigsgaard, Rasmussen and Smidt, 1998). The relationship between teacher and child is often characterised by asymmetry, control, discipline and assessment. Student teachers need to become aware of these restrictions and also consider the impact of different settings on the communication and talks between children and teachers. The outcome is different in whole class discussions and circle time as compared to talks during play, while eating, or while drawing together (Black and Varley, 2008; Rubinstein Reich, 1994).

Towards a new kind of didactics

What then is Human Rights Didactics in preschool and early years of primary school? What kind of content and what kind of processes should be in focus? My point of departure in this paper has been that CRC should be the underpinning principle in all teacher education when it comes to learning and developing human rights didactics in preschool and early years of primary school. A consequence of this is to make CRC into a subject matter of its own (Hägglund and Thelander, 2008). The content should include the child as a subject who acts the CRC but also who learns about CRC. This new subject matter has to provide a kind of didactic that does not distinguish the content, "the what" and the process, "the how". This didactic can be linked to a Dewey-based pragmatist conception of learning (see e.g. Kivinen and Ristelä, 2003) and likewise to a Habermas-based form of didactics called integrative subject-didactics (Fritzén, 2004). Both examples are attempts not to distinguish the content and the process which I believe are useful and fruitful ways forward when it comes to developing human rights didactics for young children in teacher education.

References

- Black, L. and Varley, D. (2008) Young Children's Perspectives on Whole Class Discussions. *Education 3-13*, 36, 3, pp 207-221
- Edenhammar, K. (1994) *Respekt för barnet. FN:s konvention om barnets rättigheter*. (Respecting the child. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) Stockholm: Rädda Barnen
- Englundh, E. (2008) *Folkrätt för barn som pedagogiskt åtagande. Statligt ansvar – regional lärande?* (International law on children as an educational commitment. National obligation regional learning?). Stockholm: Stockholm University
- Fritzén, L. (2007) Integrativ didaktik - en möjlig teoretisk referensram för lärarutbildningen? (Integrative didactics – a theoretical framework for teacher education?) In Fritzell, C. and Fritzén, L. (eds) *Integrativ didaktik i olika ämnesperspektiv*. Växjö, Acta Wexionensia
- Hägglund, S. and Thelander, N. (2003) Vad har barns rättigheter med högre utbildning att göra? (What is the connection between Children's Rights and higher education?) In *FN:s Barnkonvention angår högskolan*. Stockholm: Högskoleverket, 2003:6 R
- Hägglund, S. and Thelander, N. (2008) Vad har barnets rättigheter med högre utbildning att göra? (What is the connection between Children's Rights and higher education?) Dokumentation av konferens i Örebro 6 november 2007. Örebro: Barnrättsakademien, pp 44-55
- Kivinen, O. and Ristelä, P. (2003) From Constructivism to a Pragmatist Conception of Learning. *Oxford Review of Education*, 29, 3, pp 363 - 375
- Rubinstein Reich, L. (1994) Circle Time in Preschool. An Analysis of Educational Praxis. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 2, 1, pp 51 - 59

- Rubinstein Reich, L. (2001) *Mentorsprojektet Näktergalen. Möten mellan skolbarn och högskolestudenter*. (The mentoring project Näktergalen. Encounters between school children and students in higher education) Malmö: Teacher Education, Malmö university
- Rubinstein Reich, L. (2003) Student Teachers Mentoring School Children – the particular relationship of one-to-one mentoring. In Lindgren, U. (ed) "*Mentorship for learning and development*". *Contributions from an International Conference on Mentorship for Beginner Teachers and School Pupils*. Umeå: Umeå University
- Loughran, J. J., Hamilton, M. L., Kubler LaBoskey, V. and Rusell, T. (eds) (2004) *International Handbook of Self-study of teaching and teacher education practice*. London: Kluwer Academic
- Sigsgaard, E., Rasmussen, K. and Smidt, S. (1998) *Andre måder. Grænser eller ej?* (Other ways. Borders or none?) Copenhagen: Hans Reitzel