

Children's rights in Swedish teacher education

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Abstract: In 2020, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was incorporated into Swedish domestic law. In the proposals for new legislation, it is emphasised that steps be taken to develop knowledge of children's rights among professionals at all levels. This article explores the presence and status of children's rights in Swedish teacher education. A total of 362 teacher-education course plans and syllabi at 12 universities were examined, and a questionnaire was conducted among 156 teacher educators. Although teacher educators judge knowledge around children's rights to be important for pre-service teachers, the syllabi provide little guidance as to what knowledge pre-service teachers need. Using the framework for analysing human rights education designed by educational specialist Felisa Tibbitts, it is concluded that Swedish teacher education fits with a Values and Awareness Model, which is associated with socialisation but not with social change.

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Introduction

At the beginning of 2020, following a lengthy national debate in Sweden, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was incorporated into Swedish legislation. Arguments had been put forth that the principles of the best interests of the child (article 3) and children's rights to participation (article 12) would be reinforced. In the proposal for the new legislation, it was argued that a general development of competence among professionals at all levels was required (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2016; SOU, 2016). In comments to Sweden's fifth periodic report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2015, the committee expressed concern that 'relevant professionals do not have sufficient training in assessing the best interests of the child' (2015, p. 4). Undoubtedly, teachers fall into this category of relevant professionals. This article focuses on the presence of children's rights and the UNCRC in Swedish teacher education.

Children's rights can either be seen as separated from human rights and described in terms of provision, protection and participation rights – or, they can be seen as included in human rights, as children's human rights (Quennerstedt, 2010). In this article, children's rights are seen as part of a broader human rights framework; therefore, children's rights education is considered part of the overarching concept of human rights education (HRE).

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) (United Nations, 1948, article 26) and the UNCRC (articles 29 and 42) declare that all humans are entitled to know their rights and that states have the obligation to inform and educate

their citizens about them. A major component of the effectiveness of an HRE initiative is the quality of teacher training (Boutros, 2018). This article aims to explore the presence and status of children's rights in Swedish teacher education. The following research questions are addressed:

- What knowledge and capacities regarding children's rights are pre-service teachers expected to demonstrate, according to policy documents for teacher education?
- What are the goals and contents of children's rights in teacher education and where do they belong in the curricula, according to policy documents and teacher educators?
- To what degree are knowledge and capacities regarding children's rights important for pre-service teachers, according to teacher educators?

To strengthen efforts to educate people globally about their rights, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed the World Programme for Human Rights Education (ongoing through 2024) to advance the implementation of HRE (United Nations General Assembly (2005). The second phase (2010–2014) (OHCHR, 2010) focuses on HRE for higher education, and on human rights training programmes for teachers and educators.¹ According to the programme, HRE encompasses three elements: knowledge and skills (i.e., learning about human rights and mechanisms for their protection, as well as acquiring skills to apply them in daily life); values, attitudes and behaviours (i.e., developing values and reinforcing attitudes and behaviour which uphold human rights); and action (i.e., taking action to defend and promote human rights) (UN, 2005, p. 4). To further strengthen the right to education, the UN Declaration on HRE was adopted in 2011, highlighting education *about, through* and *for* human rights:

Human rights education and training encompasses education: (a) About human rights, which includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection; (b) Through human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners; (c) For human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others. (UN General Assembly, 2011, p. 3)

The first clause reaffirms that HRE has a place in all forms of education and training, including the formal, non-formal and informal sectors (Tibbitts, 2017). The second clause reflects the full spectrum of learner goals, such as knowledge/understanding, values, capacities and actions. The third clause draws attention to teaching and learning processes oriented towards taking action for human rights.

A Swedish context

If one tried to identify a Swedish self-image of children's rights, one would most likely find images of a nation upholding and safeguarding them. The banning of all corporal punishment of children in Sweden in 1979, as the first country in the world, caused some commotion internationally. Sweden was also one of the first nations to ratify the UNCRC, in 1990, and was one of the driving forces for the World Summit for Children in New York that same year. On the KidsRights Index² for 2020, Sweden ranks fourth. Then again, the UNCRC was also part of domestic legislation in Sweden's neighbouring countries long ago (Finland in 1991, Norway in 2003). Sweden has, however, received comments from the UN Committee on the Rights of

the Child on remaining challenges when it comes to protecting rights of children in vulnerable situations; e.g. children with substance-abusing parents, children with disabilities, and asylum-seeking children. The Committee also urges that the rights of the child to be heard in different contexts should be strengthened.

In Sweden, ten years of schooling is compulsory for all children, from the age of six. Preschool is accessible for children ages 1-5, and approximately 95% of all children attend it. Professional certification is required for school and preschool teachers, and most of them complete a teacher education programme of 3.5–5.5 years. Human rights—including children’s rights—have recently been emphasised in policy documents for primary and secondary school such as The Education Act (Skollag, 2010) and the Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and school-age educare (National Agency for Education, 2018). National surveys have concluded that the overall impression is that HRE in teacher education is working well (National Agency for Higher Education, 2008; Swedish Higher Education Authority, 2015) although there are still areas in need of development, such as teacher educators’ opportunities for further training.

Teacher education in Sweden is regulated at a national level by the Higher Education Ordinance (Swedish Ministry of Education and Research, 1993), where general guidelines and goals for teacher education are stipulated. For all teacher education programmes, there is an overarching syllabus, also known as the programme study plan. In accordance with the Higher Education Ordinance, all teacher education programmes include core education subjects of 60 credits, equivalent to one year of full-time study. Core education subjects comprise of seven sub-themes³ linked to future professional practice. The sub-theme of particular interest in this study is ‘History of the School System, Its Organisation and Conditions as well as Core Educational Values, Including Fundamental Democratic Values and Human Rights’.

Literature review

HRE is increasingly emerging and becoming institutionalised in university undergraduate and graduate programmes (Bajaj, 2017). In professional settings across the globe, human rights training is offered for professionals such as social workers and teachers. Bajaj (2017) explores how researchers and practitioners globally approach HRE, dealing with the theoretical and conceptual foundations as well as practices. Her book provides an overview of HRE as a scholarly field, aiming at offering working definitions, critical insights and directions, among other things, into the expanding field of HRE.

Tibbitts (2017) also points out that HRE is a newly established field of educational theory and practice, gaining increased attention and significance across the globe. A strong presence of human rights in educational curricula in recent years is observed by Garnett Russell and Suárez (2017), who link this development to three interrelated factors: globalisation, the growth of mass education, and the consolidation of the global human rights movement. We also see the growth of this movement in terms of the increased number of education textbooks mentioning human rights, as well as in the establishment of a human rights terminology.

Over the past decade, projects promoting holistic rights-based school policies have increased (Meijas, 2017). These are rooted in the notion that human rights must be simultaneously learned and practised throughout the school, supported by theoretical, empirical and political approaches and initiatives. Osler and Starkey

(2010) highlight the necessity for teachers and educators to not only teach human rights but to also demonstrate respect for human rights and democracy in education. Several scholars discuss HRE in terms of it being a transformative process, oriented towards action and social change (Bajaj, 2011; Boutros, 2018; Kingston, 2018; Osler & Starkey, 2010; Tibbitts, 2017). Yet despite growing support for HRE, human rights educators continue to face challenges. Kingston argues that the U.S. lags behind other countries in integrating HRE into public school and higher education curricula. At a majority of universities in the U.S., human rights may be addressed in just one or two supplementary lessons. This backlog of HRE is global, according to Roth (2015), as processes of implementing HRE have been too slow both at school and university level—partly due to conflicting cultural and social norms and values, and partly to other established perspectives within educational systems, such as gender equality, sustainability and equal rights.

In a literature review of global HRE initiatives, Boutros (2018) identified deficient teacher training, inadequate literature and a low level of commitment by school administrations to be major obstacles for effective implementation of human rights. Lack of student interest was explained by insufficiencies in teacher training, teachers lacking confidence and understanding in the field, and teachers' inability to connect content to students' everyday lives. According to Boutros, two important factors in implementing and realising human rights are, firstly, that teachers are taught about them and, secondly, that teachers try relate HRE to pupils' everyday lives. A vast majority of teacher education students in Scotland agreed that it was important that children be taught about human rights (Cassidy, Brunner & Webster, 2014), yet two-thirds of respondents did not feel confident in teaching about human rights, and many were uncertain about what to teach and how to teach it. The students expressed some confusion about the differences between human rights and children's rights. Moreover, religious and cultural beliefs and traditions in some settings may contradict the fundamental values of human rights. Another barrier identified by the students was that curriculum contents would be prioritised over HRE.

Bajaj (2011, 2017) stresses the importance of acknowledging varying ideologies of HRE initiatives, with attention to social settings. Implementing HRE in schools involves different challenges in different contexts across the world. Some scholars identify challenges associated with human rights values when they conflict with religious beliefs or cultural traditions (Boutros, 2018; Cassidy et al., 2014; Faiz & Kamer, 2017; Muñoz Ramírez, 2018). For example, in recent years, neoconservative Catholic sectors in Spain have mobilised people to engage in actions to remove HRE from Spanish curricula (Muñoz Ramírez, 2018). In Iraqi Kurdistan, a specific challenge raised by teachers was associated with teaching rights to children who had personal experiences of human rights abuses (Osler & Chalank, 2017). Teachers acknowledged the need for both children and adults to learn about their rights, despite the teachers' knowledge about the subject being limited. The researchers concluded that an even more serious problem was associated with teaching people their rights without addressing the authorities' obligation to secure those rights.

Some studies suggest that even though pre- and in-service teachers may support the idea of teaching pupils about children's rights, they expect to encounter different kinds of obstacles to implementing them in school. In Faiz and Kamer's study in Turkey (2017), pre-service teachers assumed that limitless freedom for

pupils in school would lead to discipline problems, while Hong Kong teachers in Leung and Lo's study (2012) feared that HRE could not only pose a threat to school discipline but also to their own interests. Howe and Covell (2005) also point out that teachers' fears of losing authority and respect from pupils and control in the classroom contribute to some teachers' reluctance to teach human rights and, especially, children's rights.

Another obstacle in the implementation of children's rights observed by researchers is the potential conflict between children's rights and parental rights. In the early 21st century, parents in Canada asked questions about their children being informed about children's rights and participating in a school election. These parents argued that this would undermine the integrity of the family and contribute to the erosion of parental authority (Howe & Covell, 2005). Cassidy et al (2014) also found that pre-service teachers feared that some parents might be offended by HRE as it might conflict with their cultural and religious beliefs.

Swedish research has mainly aimed at exploring how HRE is implemented in school, including preschool. Studies of Swedish curricula proved that aspects of children's rights and human rights were implicitly present in the texts but not expressed explicitly in terms of a rights perspective (Quennerstedt, 2015). Moreover, in national policy documents, HRE is considered an interdisciplinary field; this implies that it concerns all subjects, yet there is an apparent risk that it does not belong anywhere (Quennerstedt, Brantefors, Tellgren & Thelander, 2019). Teachers in the study of Quennerstedt et al. felt insecure about appropriate HRE content, and the researchers found that decisions about content and pedagogy regarding HRE were largely the individual teachers' responsibility. Olsson, Elvstrand and Thelander (2020) concluded that human rights and children's rights in teacher education was a matter of judgement and values rather than of knowledge and understanding.

Even though there is evidence that HRE is expanding globally, several studies imply that teachers' knowledge of the topic is limited and that many teachers are insecure about what to teach and how to teach it. Goals, contents and pedagogy in education, including teacher education and training, vary across and within nations and must be understood in their cultural and social contexts. In times of reinforcing the UNCRC in a Swedish context, it seems timely to examine how national teacher education seeks to prepare pre-service teachers to educate children about, through and for children's rights.

Conceptual framework

To analyse children's rights in Swedish teacher education, Tibbitts' (2002, 2017) framework for analysing HRE is used. Tibbitts (2002) has suggested three models for categorising and analysing HRE practice: Values and Awareness; Accountability; and Transformation. The Values and Awareness Model is associated with socialisation, the Accountability Model with professional development, and the Transformation Model with activism. Tibbitts argues that the goals of HRE are oriented around the elimination of human rights violations, and it therefore involves social change and activism. Tibbitts analyses any plausible link between the models and social change strategies. In the Values and Awareness Model, she finds no connection to theories of social change. The goal is rather to provide learners with knowledge of human rights but not encourage them to take action. In the Accountability Model, the theory of change is linked with the individual and his/her professional role. Education aims at influencing learners' knowledge, attitudes and actions so that they will respect and

promote human rights standards in their professional roles. If professionals-or future professionals-find human rights relevant for their work and change their beliefs and behaviour, this may eventually prevent human rights violations. Finally, in the Transformation Model, the theory of change is quite prominent. In this approach, the methodologies are associated with transformative and emancipatory learning. This involves critical pedagogy and reflection, and this leads to personal transformation that results in action. The models were later revised (Tibbitts, 2017) by applying some new dimensions based on Tibbitts' research and observations of practice. Tibbitts added four kinds of methodologies used in education, which intersect with the goals for HRE. These are outlined below.

Didactic methodologies. These are oriented towards the delivery of content to learners, influenced by the traditional culture of education where learners are expected to memorise specific contents without having opportunities to critically reflect or discuss. Due to the lack of participation and critical reflection, this approach can be seen as one of attempted socialisation.

Participatory or interactive methodologies. These have the purpose of helping learners reach a better understanding of human rights content and apply these values to issues at hand. These methodologies may result in engagement in the actual teaching and learning practices, but they are not actually intended to foster agency in the learner. Critical reflection on human rights values and standards and social problems may be addressed as an analytical exercise. Participatory learning takes place in both the Accountability and the Transformation Models.

Empowerment methodologies. These are oriented towards agency in learners, through developing specific capacities such as leadership and practices of non-discrimination. Empowerment methodologies are distinguished from participatory methodologies in that the learning processes aimed at increasing participants' capacities to influence their environment.

Transformative methodologies. These have explicit aims of social transformation through human rights activism. In HRE, learners are prepared to organise human rights awareness-raising activities such as campaigning. Methodologies of transformative and emancipatory learning are associated with critical pedagogy, which encourages learners to think critically about connections between individual problems and social contexts and to take action against oppression. Critical pedagogy is associated with the Transformation Model.

Materials and methods

Teacher education in Sweden is provided at 26 universities. This study covers five teacher education programmes: early-years education, primary education, grades F-3 and 4-6, secondary education, and upper-secondary education. Methods used in the study are a content analysis of policy documents and a survey. To address the first research question ('What knowledge and capacities regarding children's rights are pre-service teachers expected to demonstrate, according to policy documents for teacher education?'), programme study plans and syllabi for core education courses were analysed. To answer the second research question ('What are the goals and contents of children's rights in teacher education and where in the curricula do they belong, according to policy documents and teacher educators?'), data from both the document analysis and the survey were used. Data from the survey were used to analyse the third research question ('To what degree are knowledge and capacities

regarding children's rights important for pre-service teachers, according to teacher educators?').

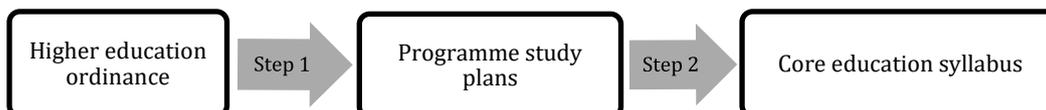
The document study included syllabi for teacher education programmes of twelve universities, selected by geographical placement and size. Programme study plans and syllabi from 2018 for each core education course were collected. Altogether, the empirical material added up to 49 programme study plans and 313 syllabi. The programme study plans and syllabi were reviewed in search of explicit and implicit keywords such as *children's rights*, *UN convention of the rights of the child* and *human rights*.

The survey consisted of an anonymised online questionnaire, sent to teacher educators at all 26 universities. Closed questions with options to comment were asked about goals and contents concerning children's rights in teacher programmes. Questions were also asked about teacher educators' knowledge, attitudes, interest and engagement in teaching children's rights. The questionnaire was sent to 317 teacher educators (69 programme coordinators and 248 course leaders) and the response rate was 49% (156 participants). In the analysis of the data of the survey, no significant differences between categories of teacher educators (preschool to upper secondary school programmes) were found in any of the questions asked. Results from the survey are presented as descriptive statistics.

Findings

Document analysis

To examine contents and goals relating to children's rights expressed in policy documents, the analysis was performed in two steps. In the first step, the focus was on how goals and content of the Higher Education Ordinance Swedish Ministry of Education and Research (1993) were transformed into local programme study plans at the university level. The second step examined how programme study plans were interpreted, translated and developed into syllabi for each core education course.



The analysis of the first step showed that local programme study plans at universities closely mirrored national goals in the Higher Education Ordinance, often using the exact wording, with no or little effort to elaborate or concretise these goals. This circumstance is in a sense natural since all universities have obligations to fulfil national goals. Nevertheless, it has a nation-wide impact on Swedish teacher education. The Higher Education Ordinance describes what teacher students shall demonstrate in order to gain a degree. There are three subheadings: Knowledge and understanding, Competence and skills, and Judgement and approach. Regarding human rights, it declares that teacher students satisfy the following requirements: Competence and skills: demonstrate the capacity to communicate and instil core educational values, including human rights and the fundamental democratic values. Judgement and approach: demonstrate the capacity to make assessments in educational processes, with particular respect for human rights, especially children's rights according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

However, under the sub-heading Knowledge and understanding there is no description of what students should demonstrate. Consequently, no programme

study plan at any teacher education programme in Sweden describes what pre-service teachers need to know and understand about children’s rights or the UNCRC.

In the second step of the analysis, 313 core education syllabi were examined, using Nvivo software for qualitative analysis. Six main categories of goals and contents related to children’s rights were identified. The first category contains explicit references to UNCRC (including alternative wording). In the second category, quotes related to children’s rights were organised. The four remaining categories concern children’s participation, equality or equal rights, non-discrimination, degrading treatment and terms related to these themes, and human rights.

At one university alone, the best interest of the child was mentioned in the syllabi. Additionally, single references were made to children’s right to play and children’s right to special needs support. The numbers of related terms and sentences in each category are listed in Table 1:

Categories	Syllabi	Quotes	Universities
UNCRC	14	19	7
Children’s rights	21	25	8
Participation	21	43	8
Equality, equal rights	18	23	8
Discrimination, degrading treatment	47	58	12
Human rights	35	77	10

Table 1. Terms found in Syllabi

Children’s Rights and the UNCRC

Although almost all course education plans (43 of 49) copied the exact wording from the Higher Education Ordinance (demonstrate the capacity to make assessments in educational processes [...] with particular respect for human rights, especially children’s rights according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child [...]), goals and contents concerning the *UNCRC* was found only in 14 of 313 syllabi.

At five of the 12 universities, the UNCRC was not mentioned in any syllabus for core education courses on any teacher education programme. In the case of *children’s rights*, the result was similar. At four universities, children’s rights were not mentioned in the syllabi. Hence, despite a distinct emphasis in the Higher Education Ordinance and the programme study plans, this was not reflected in core education course syllabi. Furthermore, at four of the universities that mentioned either the UNCRC or children’s rights, the terms occurred only in programmes for pre-service teachers in preschool and primary school. An overall reflection is that few substantial examples were given of the knowledge and skills related to the UNCRC or children’s rights that students were expected to demonstrate. *Human rights* were mentioned more frequently in policy documents, although examples of specific content were few. The relation between human rights and children’s rights was not addressed in any syllabi.

Participation

Children's participation was frequently mentioned (43 quotes) in the core education course syllabi. There were, however, no explicit links between participation and article 12 in the UNCRC, declaring children's right to express their views and be listened to. In only a few cases the term *participation* was used in relation to children influencing or participating in decision-making. On the other hand, several examples were given of goals and contents about social participation. For example, teacher students were expected to demonstrate skills to strengthen pupils' interactional skills, or apply inclusive methodologies. Also, participation was associated with special needs and inclusive education.

Fundamental Values

The Higher Education Ordinance declares that pre-service teachers should demonstrate knowledge of fundamental values such as human rights, along with skills to prevent discrimination and degrading treatment. In the syllabi, there are several goals and contents relating to these skills. For example, the requirement that pre-service teachers acquire skills to prevent bullying and promote tolerance and compassion for others is implicitly related to various articles in the UNCRC. Yet there are few cases where these fundamental values are, in fact, associated with children's rights. One single example is given in quotes from a syllabus from the teacher education programme at one university: The school's mission is to take children's rights into account- to promote equal treatment and prevent discrimination and degrading treatment of pupils. Hence, in the syllabi, several aspects related to the UNCRC are present. However, these aspects are not presented from the perspective of children's rights.

Survey

A questionnaire was distributed to study teachers' engagement in and knowledge of children's rights. The survey covered programme coordinators and course leaders for core education courses in five teacher education programmes at all 26 Swedish universities. Questions were asked about participants' views and opinions about pre-service teachers' need for knowledge and skills in children's rights and the UNCRC, and about children's rights education in relation to other subjects and perspectives. Questions were also asked about contents in the participants' courses, along with questions about their competence, the competence of colleagues and opportunities for further training. Questions were closed, and respondents could make comments.

The Importance for Pre-Service Teachers

When asked to what degree participants agreed with the statement 'Knowledge about children's rights is important for pre-service teachers', 96.8% agreed or strongly agreed. A corresponding question asked about the importance for pre-service teachers to have knowledge about the UNCRC, and results were similar; 83.5% of participants fully agreed while 13.3% agreed. Thus, 96.8% of the participants in the survey supported the importance of both children's rights and the UNCRC in teacher education. Only one participant did not agree with either of these statements.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	140	88.6
	Agree	13	8.2
	Disagree	0	0
	Strongly disagree	1	0.6
	No answer	4	2.5
	Total	158	100

Table 2. The importance of knowledge about children’s rights

Subject and Contents

When asked in what subject field children’s rights belonged, 51.2% responded that it was an interdisciplinary field concerning all core education courses, while another 38.8% reported that children’s rights should be part of their own or other core education courses. Of the participants, 3.7% supported the idea that children’s rights should be a subject on its own. Participants were asked to mark what knowledge and skills about children’s rights pre-service teachers need. The pre-defined responses were:

- knowledge of the articles in the UNCRC;
- knowledge about the UNCRC, its history and global deployment;
- knowledge and skills to observe the principles of the UNCRC in their future profession;
- knowledge and skills to foster children to exercise their rights; and
- knowledge and skills to foster children to take action defending their own and other children’s rights.

Participants could choose all applicable responses. The most frequent response was ‘knowledge and skills to observe the principles of the UNCRC in their future profession’ (80%). About 73% chose knowledge about ‘the articles in the UNCRC,’ and ‘skills to foster children to exercise their rights.’ The two other alternatives were each checked by approximately 50% of the participants. When asked whether knowledge and skills concerning children’s rights are most important for pre-service teachers for younger children, 23% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed. (Note that there were no significant differences between teacher educators for different stages.)

Competence and Priority

Questions were also asked about how participants rated their own and their colleagues’ knowledge and skills concerning children’s rights. 92.2% of participants judged their knowledge to be good or satisfactory, while colleagues were trusted to have good or satisfactory knowledge in 93.8% of cases. Furthermore, a question was asked as to whether education about children’s rights risked being deprioritised as a result of competition with other perspectives such as sustainability, gender equality and cultural diversity. On this notion, 21% agreed or strongly agreed, while 30% agreed to some degree, and 22% disagreed.

In open-ended commentaries to the question, some ($n = 7$) responses stated that children’s rights should be regarded as integrated into an overarching theme of core values, involving sustainability, gender equality and cultural diversity. Several comments ($n > 10$) in open-ended responses also stated that the contents in the courses they were responsible for related implicitly to the UNCRC; however, these

were not expressed in the goals: 'Perhaps not explicitly in course goals, but it is present in course contents, definitely.' 'Children's rights are included but not mentioned specifically,' and '[...] not explicitly but covered by goals, the way I see it.'

Analysis

Teacher educators appear to highly support the idea of children's rights and the UNCRC as important and relevant perspectives in teacher education programmes. Yet, the results of the study reveal uncertainties about appropriate content for pre-service teachers to learn, and it is unclear where in the curriculum children's rights belong. Overall, children's rights seem related to judgements and values rather than to knowledge and understanding. The contents are expressed in general terms, and syllabi provide little guidance about what teachers need to know to be prepared to teach children's rights. The message in national policies is that teacher students should demonstrate respect for children's rights according to the UNCRC, which is reflected in programme study plans. Despite this, goals and contents in syllabi are rarely clarified and concretised; they rather turn out vague or simply vanish.

Several comments in the survey reported that the course contents implicitly relate to the UNCRC or are expressed in other words than in terms of children's rights. Other comments expressed that children's rights were to be regarded as integrated into an overarching theme of core values, involving sustainability, gender equality and cultural diversity. Hence, children's rights seem to be conceptualised by teacher educators as part of a body of democratic values rather than in specific terms.

Out of the three models for categorising and analysing HRE practices introduced by Tibbitts (2002, 2017), the Values and Awareness Model seems to be the most applicable to the results of this study. Few traces of social change, empowerment or transformative contents or methods are found in the study data. It is noteworthy that 70% of teacher educators supported the notion that pre-service teachers should acquire 'skills to foster children to exercise their rights'. A limitation was, however, that participants could choose all applicable responses without being encouraged to prioritise. Aside from this result, no other examples related to social change were found.

The Values and Awareness Model of HRE is, according to Tibbitts, noncritical towards society; consequently, it is not designed to cultivate critical reflection, learner agency or social transformation. Tibbitts describes the model as fragmented and incomplete, analysed in terms of the UN definition, which includes the concepts of *about*, *through*, and *for* HRE. In Tibbitts' opinion, it is also potentially counterproductive, due to the lack of participation and critical reflection.

Discussion

Given the notion of children's rights education being *about*, *through* and *for* human rights, the results of the study indicate that the goals and contents of Swedish teacher education are predominantly *about* children's rights. Participants agreed that teacher education should aim at pre-service teachers observing the principles of the UNCRC in their future profession, suggesting some support for the *through* aspect. Nevertheless, there is little evidence in the syllabi, aside from general goals and contents, of what teacher students are expected to learn about children's rights.

Prior research has found that teachers and teacher students for different reasons often feel insecure about what to teach and how to do it in the field of human rights - including children's rights (Cassidy et al. 2014; Kingston, 2018; Quennerstedt

et al., 2019; Roth, 2015). Parker (2018) argues that HRE curricula are ‘at best opaque’ (p. 5) and at worst underdeveloped, only mentioning human rights. He advocates that there is a need for an HRE curriculum based on a theory of knowledge, clarifying what knowledge about HRE includes. Parker also presents outlines for such a curriculum:

Here are the norms and principles of human rights, the values that underpin them, their histories, the mechanisms for their protection, and methods and stories of political activism to hold governments accountable for protecting human rights and to protest and prevent violations. (Parker, 2018, p. 13)

Furthermore, the curriculum needs a pedagogical theory about how to organise knowledge for children and young people of different ages and stages, Parker argues. In this study, policy documents indicate that children’s rights and the UNCRC are more important for teachers of younger children. The study does not provide data to explain this circumstance, though it may support Parker’s idea about a curriculum explicating beginning, intermediate and advanced understandings of human rights.

In syllabi and in the survey, children’s participation seems to be an essential issue within the field of children’s rights. Article 12 in the UNCRC is widely known as the ‘participation article,’ following Hammarberg’s (1990) grouping of the articles according to three P’s: provision, protection, and participation. The intention of article 12 is that children should have the right to express views and opinions and have them respected. *Participation* may, however, be mixed up with other understandings of the concepts, such as people’s right to participation and accessibility in society, but also to be socially included among peers and in school.

Thomas (2007) distinguishes two ways of looking at children’s participation; one that regards it in terms of social relations and another that sees it in terms of political relations. According to Thomas, the social discourse of networks, inclusion and of social connection is predominant. Although the two alternative discourses relate to different versions of participatory practice, Thomas reflects that they may also be describing the same practice from different perspectives.

Inspired by Thomas, Elvstrand (2009) uses the concepts *social participation* and *political participation*. In the document analysis, no examples were found where participation is associated with article 12 in the UNCRC, and only a few examples were found of political participation. Several examples, however, are associated with themes such as inclusive education, special needs, diversity, and anti-oppressive pedagogy. These are related to social participation and all are relevant to the UNCRC-although not to article 12.

Several comments from participants suggest that children’s rights and the UNCRC are addressed implicitly in courses. This aligns with previous research into Swedish curricula for primary and secondary school, which concluded that aspects of children’s rights were present in the texts but not expressed explicitly in terms of a rights perspective (Quennerstedt, 2015). Moreover, in the survey, approximately half of the group of participants supported the idea of children’s rights as an interdisciplinary field concerning all teacher education courses.

A similar result was found by Quennerstedt et al (2019), yet the researchers saw an apparent risk that children’s rights end up not belonging anywhere, with no-one responsible for teaching them. This concern was also commented on by one of the participants in the survey: ‘Though there is a risk that if it is not in the course plan; that it is forgotten about unless there is a devoted course leader.’

As for the implicit presence of children's rights education or contents in the document analysis, several words and sentences included themes such as equal rights, discrimination or degrading treatment, with strong relevance to the articles in the UNCRC. These statements were, however, rarely expressed in terms of children's rights, and results were similar to previous research (Quennerstedt, 2015). Questions have been raised by researchers as to whether children's rights education may be crowded out by curriculum content (Boutros, 2018; Cassidy et al., 2014; Faiz & Kamer, 2017) or by other interdisciplinary perspectives (Roth, 2015). In the survey, questions were asked about whether children's rights education might be deprioritised in relation to subjects such as maths and language or competing perspectives such as sustainability and cultural diversity. More than one-fifth of the group responded negatively to these questions, while the rest either confirmed that, to some extent, there was such a risk, or responded: 'Do not know.'

Human rights education may vary, depending on national context and social location (Bajaj, 2011; Tibbitts, 2002). Three models of ideological orientations of HRE are introduced by Bajaj: for *global citizenship*, for *coexistence* and for *transformative action*. The ideological basis for Swedish teacher education seems predominantly to be associated with the Global Citizenship Model, which seeks to provide learners with knowledge and skills related to universal values and to foster empathy and compassion. The aim to promote global citizenship is seen as beneficial in its own terms. Bajaj suggests that learners usually have a privileged position and that the emphasis in education is commonly put on individual rights, rather than on what might be perceived as a challenge to the state.

Conclusions

Results from the survey and the document analysis are, to some extent, contradictory. Teachers appear to find knowledge of children's rights and of the UNCRC highly important for pre-service teachers, and competence among teacher educators is judged to be good, while the analysis of policy documents points in a slightly different direction.

Results of the document analysis give few examples of what teacher students are expected to learn about children's rights, and despite the clear position made in the Higher Education Ordinance, there seems to be a gradual dilution of goals and contents from the national to the local level. In relation to UN standards about HRE being *about*, *through* and *for* human rights, Swedish teacher education must be considered incomplete, particularly in terms of the account of the last-mentioned aspect - there is a lack of attention to transformation processes oriented towards taking action for human rights (Tibbitts, 2017). Hence, an overall conclusion is that the policy document for Swedish teacher education does not contain ambitions to foster agency in new generations of pupils, nor does it aim at empowering pupils to defend and promote their own and other children's rights.

Importantly, these results neither present how teacher educators understand children's rights education nor discuss how they practice it in their courses. In practice, the participants in the study may very well conduct lessons and courses which encourage student's critical reflection and social change. However, these events largely depend on engaged and informed individuals taking responsibility for children's rights education. Consequently, there is a risk that children's rights in Swedish teacher education may become a matter of all or nothing.

Notes

¹ The first phase (2005–2009) focused on human rights education in the primary and secondary school systems. The second phase (2010–2014), civil servants, law enforcement officials and military personnel. The third phase (2015–2019) focuses on strengthening the implementation of the first two phases and promoting human rights training for media professionals and journalists. In the fourth phase (2020–2024), youth are the focus group of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, with special emphasis on education and training in equality, human rights and non-discrimination, and inclusion and respect for diversity.

² Information about methodology and indicators are found on kidsrights.org. Index is based on quantitative data published by UNICEF, UNDP and qualitative data published by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

³ These sub-themes are 1) History of the school system, its organisation and conditions as well as the core values of early years education, including fundamental democratic values and human rights, 2) Syllabus theory and didactics, 3) Theory of knowledge and research methodology, 4) Development, learning and special needs education, 5) Social relationships, conflict management and leadership, 6) Assessment and grading, and 7) Evaluation and development processes.

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