


Chapter 8

Touching the Untouchables: Pre-Service Teachers' Views About the Rights of the Child Based on Focus Group Discussions


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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses pre-service teachers' views about the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child and how teachers perceive their connection to the educational context and their work. The authors argue that pre-service teachers' perceptions determine how successfully human rights education is implemented in practice. The data were collected from workshops and focus group discussions conducted with 82 primary school pre-service teachers in Northern Finland. The participants noted that children's rights are important and deeply connected to their work. However, they were insufficiently familiar with HRE concepts, and they were uncertain about whether it was acceptable to physically restrain children to protect them or others, as this could undermine a child's rights. To adhere to the principles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the topic must be included in the pre-service study syllabus, more clearly added to the curriculum, and implemented in teacher practice.

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INTRODUCTION

World Children's Day is celebrated on 20 November each year, signifying both the date in 1959 when the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the date in 1989 when the Convention on the Rights of the Child (herein, referred to as the Rights of the Child), an international legal framework, was adopted. In Finland, the Convention came into force in 1991. The objective of World Children's Day is to promote awareness of children's rights worldwide among children and adults, improve children's overall welfare and enhance international unity and co-operation. The Rights of the Child can be understood to be part of human rights (Quennerstedt, 2010).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted on 10 December 1948 by the UN General Assembly. Although people had advocated for and debated about human rights for centuries, the Declaration brought together, for the first time, the most basic human rights that were considered to belong to every human being, regardless of age, origin, culture or religion. The destruction and events of World War II, including the Holocaust and the detonation of nuclear bombs, as well as the blatant trampling on human rights, informed the preparation of the UN Declaration so that similar atrocities would never occur again. On the basis of these ideas, the UN was founded in 1945, calling for respect for human rights and the safeguarding of world peace. However, moral values vary greatly, so it is relevant to teach children about such values and discuss current topics at school. Moreover, children need to be taught about their rights and how these rights are connected to human rights.

Today, children construct their worldview by combining elements from multiple sources rather than by basing it on the ideologies held by previous generations. With widespread access to the Internet, we are living in a global transition period in which children are developing their interpretations of the world through their own perceptions, their cultural heritage and the media. Society, community and family all influence the development of a child's worldview (Kuusisto & Gearon, 2019). Schools play a particularly important role in supporting the learning of different worldviews and tolerance, while also preventing exclusion and radicalisation. Teachers play a central role in this process of openness, fairness and justice. Furthermore, children and young people need a conversational, harmonious and communal school environment. The teacher is required to create a pedagogical space that supports peer relationships and improves children's social skills, increasing their sense of belonging and inclusion (Syrjämäki, Pihlaja, & Sajaniemi, 2019). However, pre-service teachers may be sorely underprepared for the challenging and diverse educational contexts they may encounter in their future career (Jones, 2019). Moreover, implementation of human rights education (HRE) remains challenging in the context of teacher education (see Olsson, 2020).

The rights of children are perceived to be at a high level in Finland: education is open to everyone, high quality social and health care is accessible for all and paid for by the society. The care provided to children and their level of well-being are high, and the standard of living of families and the rate of employment of parents are relatively good. However, according to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Finland (2011) the increase in the level of children's exclusion is concerning; some children and adolescents do not feel well and they face a variety of risk factors in their lives. The concerns include loneliness, violence, mental health problems, substance abuse and family poverty. Harinen and Halme (2012) found that Finnish schools offer an encouraging growth environment for students who are already doing well in life. Pupils who do not do well in school also face challenges outside the classroom and they need more support and guidance. UNICEF Finland commissioned a study on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2006) to determine the extent to which high school students in Finland know about human rights and

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children's rights. The study found that children have a poor understanding of human rights; nearly half of them would allow mild corporal punishment (UNICEF, 2006). Thus, information about the Rights of the Child and human rights should be more purposefully included in education and must be taught in all grades. This matter was considered when planning the new curriculum in 2014.

In Finland, the core curriculum promotes the principles advocated for in the Rights of the Child. The basic education curriculum (2016) requires that children's rights must be considered in the curriculum and in all school activities, and inclusion must be promoted. Hence, conducting a study in a teacher education context with pre-service teachers is important and interesting. What is their perspective of the principles set out in the Rights of the Child? Since, in general, children's rights are viewed as being important in Finnish society (see Jalonen, 2011; Lastensuojelun keskusliitto, 2020), this article discusses pre-service teachers' views of the Declaration and how they can utilise those principles when they instruct children in their classrooms in the future.

Previous studies have mainly focused on pre-service teachers' attitudes towards human rights or the rights of children, or topics related to those rights, such as inclusive education (see e.g. Bilgen, 2019; Goddard & Evans, 2018). To promote the role of HRE in the teacher education curriculum, more research is needed to determine what pre-service teachers actually know about human rights and how they connect those to their daily work.

To fill the research gap, the study discussed in this article addressed the following research questions:

- What kind of knowledge do pre-service teachers demonstrate regarding human rights education?
- How do pre-service teachers perceive human rights education in connection to their work?

These research questions aimed to provide more insight into how pre-service teacher education should be developed based on the study results. Toward that end, the study focused on the need to produce knowledge about pre-service teachers' perceptions of HRE. Every day, teachers work with students with diverse backgrounds. Recently, the student body has become even more diverse because of migration and societal changes, such as urbanisation.

HRE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

As suggested by the UN, HRE consists of all educational training that seeks to raise awareness and promote respect for human rights. The UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training was adopted in 2011 (United Nations General Assembly, 2011). Its fundamental objective is to declare access to HRE and training at all levels and in all types of education. The Declaration pays particular attention to three aspects of HRE: education about human rights, through human rights and for human rights.

The importance of HRE in general education has grown in the last decade; however, its implementation has been very slow (Roth, 2015), calling for familiarisation with and practice of the concept in teacher training and at schools (Olsson, 2020; Robinson, Phillips, & Quennerstedt, 2020). According to previous studies, teaching human rights in teacher education is a sensitive and somewhat difficult topic, as many people have misconceptions about it. In-service teachers and pre-service teachers often find it difficult to teach human rights, and they might not know how to approach the topic with their students (Cassidy, Brunner, & Webster, 2014; Quennerstedt, 2015). Furthermore, the integration of HRE is often unsystematic, as a study in 12 countries revealed (Lundy, Kilkelly, Byrne, & Kang, 2012). Zembylas,

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Charalambous, and Charalambous (2016) reported that pre-service teachers found it difficult to talk about and define human rights. This influenced how they prepared and taught the lessons and their pedagogical perspectives. In terms of the participants' teaching practices, Zembylas et al. (2016) reported on the dominance of a "declarational" approach; decontextualization; the trivialization of human rights; and the retreat to familiar discourses and activities. Similarly, Olsson (2020) found that human rights were usually implicitly present in the course plans of teacher education programmes and the syllabi provided little guidance as to what knowledge pre-service teachers would need and what they are expected to learn about children's rights. Teacher educators supported the idea of including children's rights in the teacher education curriculum, but they were uncertain about where that topic should be included in the curriculum. Similarly, Boutros (2018) found that teacher training on the issues of HRE was deficient, resulting in the teachers' inability to connect human rights and children's rights to the students' everyday lives and implement it into their practice. Based on previous studies, it is evident that teachers need more knowledge about and guidance concerning children's rights and how to use this in their teaching.

Although we talk about a multicultural society and tolerating, accepting and rejoicing in otherness, studies have shown that children and adolescents with an immigrant background, who speak a language at home other than the majority language, or who are raised to hold religious values, are more likely to be bullied (Schihalejev, Kuusisto, Vikdahl, & Kallioniemi, 2019). The predisposing factors for radicalisation include discrimination, lack of self-regulation, feelings of superiority and lack or incomprehension of knowledge. The factors that prevent radicalisation include knowledge, worldview, positive self-perception and strong social relationships. Dialogue about empathy and human dignity can be achieved through HRE; in turn, this can enhance intercultural respect and acceptance (Yamniuk, 2017).

Positive social relationships, and strong relationships with immediate family members, relatives, friends and school-related peers are able to combat exclusion, which is a potential cause of radicalisation and violence (Kuusisto & Gearon, 2019; Zambeta, Leontsini, Askouni, Papadakou, & Psochios, 2016). Previous studies (Howe & Covell, 2011; Tibbitts, 2009) also confirmed that, in schools in which HRE has been implemented, empathy skills and understanding were enhanced when they were combined with the application of human rights principles. HRE can be seen as a process towards social change (Kingston, 2018; Tibbitts, 2017).

According to Bilgen (2019), the attitudes of pre-service teachers in Turkey towards children's rights were high; female students had a better attitude than the male students, and the attitudes of the students varied between the different universities. Thus, Bilkin (2019) suggested including the courses related to the Rights of the Child within the framework of compulsory courses and increasing the number of informative education activities for male students regarding the rights of children. Leblebici and Çeliköz (2017) studied the pre-service teachers' attitudes towards children's rights; they found that female pre-service teachers had more positive attitudes than their male counterparts. They also found that the pre-service teachers who had read the Rights of the Child exhibited a more positive attitude toward children's rights in comparison to pre-service teachers who had not. Thus, educating pre-service teachers about children's rights is a starting point for an academic audience interested in developing HRE. In addition to attitudes, it is essential to more closely investigate pre-service teachers' knowledge about and perceptions of human rights.

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METHODOLOGY

Primary School Teacher Education Programme as a Context

The primary school teacher education programme of the University of Lapland follows a research-based approach; thus, the study courses are integrated with research and pre-service teachers must independently complete empirical research. The programme lasts five years, and each pre-service teacher completes a master's degree in education studies, which includes both academic studies and practical professional development in a primary school (called the teaching practicum). Pedagogical and methodological studies are interconnected with the teaching practicum both chronologically and by content.

Pre-service teachers are seen as reflective practitioners and researchers; therefore, their identity formation and professional development are promoted throughout the programme (Kaasila & Lauriala, 2010). The ultimate aim is to educate pedagogical and didactic experts that can work creatively and flexibly in changing situations and environments in cooperation within their own profession and as part of an interprofessional team. The programme uses an inclusive approach; thus, this topic is included in the study courses and curriculum as a cross-cutting theme.

Participants, Data Collection and Data Analysis

The study participants were 82 first-year pre-service teachers who attended the *Didactics of History and Social Studies* course as part of their interdisciplinary studies. There were five divided groups of whole approximately 100 pre-service teachers (18–25 students in each group). Each group attended its own sessions. The last session addressed human rights and children's rights. The pre-service teachers were given a pre-assignment for the session with a flipped learning type model, which can be executed in various ways (see Yoshida 2016; Yungweil & Lee, 2016). The pre-service teachers were asked to study the Convention on the Rights of the Child by themselves through specific material given to them as well as with all the online material they could find, so they would have prior knowledge of the topic when participating in the session (see Denscomben, 2003.)

The session began with a short introduction to children's rights led by the university lecturer. Then, the pre-service teachers were given the following instructions: "The workshop will be held using learning café teaching methods. You will be divided into four smaller groups, and each group will attend one of the workshop sessions. The themes in the workshop sessions are linked to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Read the instructions carefully and write down your own opinions or/and your group's opinions on the sheets of paper. You have 15 minutes to work on this."

The topics of the workshops were: 1) How do Articles 2, 12 and 13 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child challenge the Finnish educational system? 2) What opportunities and challenges do Articles 2, 3, 30 and 31 present to schools and teachers from the point-of-view of minority students? 3) How do Articles 2, 3, 28 and 29 address the inclusivity? What ideas can you suggest for how to improve this? What should be taken into consideration? 4) What topics from the Rights of the Child should teachers consider in their work when educating students to be good citizens?

The pre-service teachers were randomly divided into smaller four person groups. Using the learning café method, the groups sat around four different tables where they discussed certain topics related to the Rights of the Child. The pre-service teachers could write down their thoughts on poster paper. They were guided by the university didactic lecturer of history and social sciences, a researcher with expertise

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in the supervision of pre-service teachers and a university researcher with expertise in Sámi educational issues, and, in two cases, another university lecturer with expertise in multiculturalism in education. Thus, the workshop leaders represented a group of interdisciplinary experts on HRE.

After compiling their ideas, each group presented one poster and summarised the main topics that were written down. The lecturers and researchers acted as experts and led discussions on the topics. They also supervised the pre-service teachers' group discussions as when needed. The pre-service teachers were actively involved in the process, and they perceived this kind of working method to be motivating. They raised questions for the experts during the workshop so the sessions can be seen as a fruitful learning situation. The discussions in plenary mode after the group work were recorded by the research team and transcribed later for research purposes (see Hennink 2014; Parker & Tritter, 2007). At the end of the lesson, the pre-service teachers were encouraged to bring up other articles from the Convention of the Rights of the Child that they saw as being relevant for teachers' work.

During the workshops, the data were collected using focus group discussions. The focus group participants independently familiarised themselves with the topic beforehand; thus, when the group met, everyone had the same knowledge (Denscomben, 2003). This is relevant because the interactions among members of the group make it possible for the results to develop. The moderator stays in the background and functions as the facilitator of the discussion (Hennink, 2014; Parker & Tritter, 2007).

To effectively facilitate a focus group, the discussion must be planned in detail prior to the session (Krueger, 1988; Morgan, 1988; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The pre-assignment and material must be determined, key questions about the workshop must be addressed, the number of people needed for a group to be functional must be determined, clear instructions must be given at the end of the workshop and the closing discussion must be thought through, beforehand. It is also important to plan how to collect the data, create a relaxing atmosphere and maintain a neutral attitude and appearance (Krueger, 1988; Morgan, 1988; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

The data consist of a recorded discussion that lasted 2 hours and 38 minutes, 41 pages of transcriptions (in a Microsoft Word document) and 20 posters that were developed by the pre-service teachers during the workshop. The data were analysed using qualitative thematic analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Mayring, 2014); in this study, this meant frame familiarisation, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and finally writing up the analysis. The first phase, familiarisation, involved reading the data and becoming familiar with it. The second phase, coding the data, included identifying important features of the data that would be relevant when seeking answers to the research questions. The third phase, generating themes, included looking closely at the coding and identifying wider patterns. The fourth phase meant reviewing the themes and double checking that they all were relevant to the research. Before writing the task, a detailed analysis of each theme was developed. The analysis consists of the top themes: pre-service teachers' views and their perceptions about how the Rights of the Child is connected to teachers' daily educational practice, such as understanding the meaning of the principles presented in the Rights of the Child and uncertainty about their practical implications in education.

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FINDINGS

Pre-Service Teachers' Views About the Rights of the Child

Firstly, this article presents pre-service teachers' views on the Rights of the Child. The data were gathered from discussions with pre-service teachers based on participation in the learning café workshop. The pre-service teachers learned about the Rights of the Child independently as a flipped learning method before participating in the workshop. In the workshop, one of the tasks was to discuss how various articles of the Rights of the Child were perceived by the pre-service teachers.

According to pre-service teachers, the articles in the Rights of the Child are constructed in a manner that supports children's development. For example, Article 2, which refers to prohibiting discrimination, was seen to ensure that children are accepted as individuals and be seen for who they are, while also guaranteeing that they are treated in a just and equal way. Articles 12–13 refer to allowing children to express their opinions as long as doing so does not hurt others. The pre-service teachers felt that this supports children's ability to develop into adults that are capable of have a positive influence on society. Overall, the Rights of the Child was also seen to support immigrants' social integration and prevent marginalisation in society.

There were several perceived ambiguities in the proclamations included in the Rights of the Child. The pre-service teachers were unsure about the practical implications of some of the articles, especially Article 3, which states that a child's best interest shall be considered in all decision-making concerning the child. The pre-service teachers also found it challenging to define in practice the situations in which teachers could undermine a child's right to not be touched against their will. For example, some of the pre-service teachers were uncertain whether they were allowed to physically restrain children engaged in a fight, or protect themselves in case a child was attacking them. Overall, they felt that the child's subjective experience was the best way to determine the difference between acceptable and unacceptable touch. They also noted that, in certain cases, for instance protecting a child from physical danger, touching could not be avoided regardless of the child's feelings. It was also pointed out that sometimes children are not aware of their right not to be touched, or of what constitutes inappropriate touching or abuse. Conversely, the pre-service teachers in another group felt that children are very aware of their rights with regards to being touched. This is a good reminder that teacher education instructors must consider the up-to-date regulations and ethics concerning the teachers' rights to work with children. In response the issue of touch, two of the pre-service teachers noted:

Some situations are very clear, I've been in a situation where I had to physically separate two children from one another, because one attacked the other. In that case, the situation is clear; you can't just sit and watch what's going to happen. (Pre-service student no. 26.)

Is there a law that says you're not allowed to touch? Are there some limits? (Pre-service student no. 58.)

The pre-service teachers perceived Article 3, which states the importance of considering the best interest of a child, to be the most important, generally, as well as in an educational context. It was also seen to be closely linked to all the other articles. However, Article 3 was seen to pose practical challenges, as considering the best interest of one child can lead to undermining the rights of another child. This was perceived to be a risk, especially in the context of education, where a teacher must consider the best

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interests of multiple children with various backgrounds and needs. Pre-service teachers also noted that a child's own needs or wishes do not necessarily constitute the best interests of that child, nor should they be considered as such. A child's best interest is also determined by his/her unique situation and needs, which requires careful consideration from adults. One of the pre-service teachers noted:

Then, we were also thinking about what is in the best interest of the child. If we think about for example, that children should be with their parents or they should get to spend a lot of time with their parents, but is it in every child's best interests. (Pre-service teacher no. 8.)

Freedom to express one's opinion and the right to one's own culture and language were also perceived as ambiguous from a practical perspective. The pre-service teachers found it difficult to define the difference between what constitutes a simple expression of one's opinion and what constitutes speech that violates the rights of others. Defining the difference was considered to be increasingly challenging because people are often easily offended. Pre-service teachers also felt this lack of clarity could have practical implications on their work. One of the pre-service teachers noted:

As for Articles 12 and 13, we were thinking about, that we have freedom of speech in Finland and that's often used as justification for offending other people, but then the question is where is the line. (Pre-service-teacher no. 11.)

The right to one's own culture and language was brought up several times by the pre-service teachers, and its importance in ensuring fair and equal treatment of all children was also highlighted. However, the pre-service teachers identified a possible conflict between a child's right to his/her own culture and language, and wider societal interests, especially in cases where a child's cultural background and the values and norms attached to it clash with the values and norms generally accepted by the mainstream society. This can also cause anxiety in the child, who is forced to balance between two conflicting sets of norms. One of the pre-service teachers noted:

How about if you come from a different culture and there are different rules regarding touching and so on, that physical punishment is allowed there or something like that. And the children learn that at home, and then when they come here, the family doesn't necessarily change their behaviour. So, what if the child is taught completely different values at home and at school? (Pre-service teacher no. 87.)

Excerpts from the collaborative discussions illustrated above, as well as information provided on the posters produced by the pre-service teachers, indicate that the pre-service teachers held multiple ideas of children's rights, and that they found many challenges in applying those rights in practice. However, the pre-service teachers' views about the components of human rights, such as cultural diversity and inclusive education, were quite narrow. Culturally diversity was perceived through every student's right to maintain his/her language and culture and be provided with an inclusive educational environment. It is understandable that, as first-year pre-service teachers, the participants lacked specific knowledge about and concepts of those themes, which affected the way they understood human rights.

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The Rights of the Child's Connection to the Educational Context and the Teachers' Work

Overall, pre-service teachers felt that, in general, the principles in the Rights of the Child were effectively upheld in the Finnish school system. The pre-service teachers felt that many factors supported the realisation of the Rights of the Child in the educational context: comprehensive school in Finland is free, which ensures all children have access to education, and teachers and other personnel at school are highly educated and most are competent in their jobs. Equality is also an important value of the Finnish school system.

However, most of the pre-service teachers saw a clear link between the realisation of the Rights of the Child and the resources available in a specific municipality or school. Lack of resources, such as an adequate number of competent personnel, appropriate premises or teaching materials, was perceived as a risk and a challenge that can lead to children's rights not being respected, especially when it comes to issues related to inclusion and minorities. Several pre-service teachers felt that the lack of assistants in the classroom makes it difficult or even impossible for the teacher to provide good quality education to all students, especially in cases where there are several children with special needs in the classroom. The lack of qualified teachers and teaching materials was perceived as posing a possible risk to children's rights to learn about their own language, culture and religion at school. Language barriers can also hinder the cooperation between the teacher and the child's family, thus preventing them from working together to ensure the best interests of the child. Two of the pre-service teachers noted:

Children must have a right to their own language and to be taught in their own language, which unfortunately is not realised everywhere and is difficult to implement. (Pre-service teacher no. 45.)

The challenge is to find competent teachers and teaching material, and it also mentions challenges posed by a language barrier et cetera; so, if we're, for example, talking about a language minority, it can be challenging to find a teacher who speaks that particular language. (Pre-service teacher no. 4.)

Lack of support for the teachers was also seen to pose a challenge to their ability to provide good quality education to their students. Teachers' high workload due to large classroom sizes and students with special needs can lead to stress and even burnout, which prevents them from providing the best possible education to children. One of the pre-service teachers noted:

Connected to this is also teachers' burnout and, whether good quality education can be realised from that perspective, that how much of a strain is the teacher under if there are those children with special needs in the class. (Pre-service teacher no. 79.)

While pre-service teachers thought it was sometimes challenging to uphold the principles in the Rights of the Child due to a lack of resources, they also saw it as an opportunity to improve and enrich their teaching. For example, one group brought up the possibility of incorporating religious and cultural studies of ethnic minority students into the lesson plan for the whole class, thus allowing the everyone to learn about different cultures while respecting minority students' rights to receive education concerning their own religion and culture. The participants also felt this could provide them with an opportunity to gain new perspectives as teachers. One of the pre-service teachers noted:

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Treating everyone equally, and then you have immigrants and other minorities and that is also a possibility, in the sense that it gives you new perspectives for teaching. (Pre-service teacher no. 68).

Other groups saw that upholding the principles presented in the Rights of the Child could also provide clear guideline for decision-making. This was especially seen to be the case with Article 3, which states that the best interest of the child should be considered at all times. Several of the preservice teachers noted:

The best interest of the child, and we think that should always be a priority when it comes to teaching (Pre-service teacher no. 38).

The best interest of the child must be the starting point for everything (Pre-service teacher no. 2).

It's basically connected to all these others, all activities should be thought about from that perspective, that it's in the best interest of the child. Not in the best interest of the teacher or the parents, but in the best interest of the child on all those levels (Pre-service teacher no. 10.)

When it comes to considering the best interest of the child, we thought about it as an opportunity, that when a teacher knows that now they have to think about the best interest of the child, perhaps it helps them make consistent decisions in their teaching when there is a clear line. (Pre-service teacher no. 12.)

The pre-service teachers highlighted that teachers should ensure that the principles in the Rights of the Child are respected in the educational system, and that children understand their own rights and learn to respect each other's rights. According to the participants, teachers can support the realisation of the Rights of the Child by teaching children about their right to not be touched against their will or their right to express their own opinion. This was seen as especially important for rights that can be ambiguous; for example, not all children know the difference between appropriate and inappropriate touching, or the difference between expressing one's opinion and offending someone. Thus, teachers can support students by creating a safe and open atmosphere to explore the topic. The pre-service teachers also noted that teachers act as an example for students:

You need to respect a child's right to privacy, and teach the others to respect each other's right to privacy as well (Pre-service teacher no. 6).

When you have children from different cultures in the classroom, it's important that you teach them about the boundaries everyone is allowed to have. In a way we as teachers are spreading the knowledge about what is right and what is wrong. (Pre-service teacher no. 11.)

As a teacher, you need to teach where the line is between offending someone and expressing your own opinion; children need to be taught that (Pre-service teacher no. 77).

Teachers' expertise was seen as vital in ensuring that the principles of the Rights of the Child are successfully realised in education. The pre-service teachers emphasised that teachers need to know their students well to avoid situations where they might offend or hurt them, and to know when they might need help or support. This was seen as especially challenging in matters that are not straightforward,

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such as being able to recognise when students are alone by choice and when they are being discriminated against, or when they are fine with being touched and when they are not. Some pre-service teachers noted that the large number of students in one classroom often means that teachers have difficulties noticing and getting to know each individual. Sometimes, they might be forced to make decisions under a lot of pressure. For example, one pre-service teacher expressed their concern about having to notify child welfare in suspected cases of child abuse, because it can be challenging to recognise the difference between a child telling a story to gain attention and a child being actually abused, like some of the pre-service teachers noted:

As a teacher, you really need to know your pupils, so you'll be able to know that you're not offending that pupil (Pre-service teacher no. 12).

Knowing your pupils is important because some pupils are just fine with you guiding them a bit by hand, whereas others don't like being touched (Pre-service teacher no. 44).

You need to have your feelers constantly up; there is a certain kind of emotional intelligence in this job (Pre-service teacher no. 18).

According to the pre-service teachers, the concept of inclusion has both positive and negative implications. It was seen as being positive because it prevents discrimination by providing all children with an equal chance to learn regardless of any special needs they may have. Inclusion also guarantees that all children can belong to the same group as their peers. However, some pre-service teachers felt that the practice of inclusion can lead to not all children's rights being fully realised. One of the issues emerging from the data was the fact that the practice of inclusion can sometimes lead to discrimination, for instance in cases where a child with special needs is labelled as a troublemaker by other students. One group also pointed out that sometimes measures introduced with the intention of supporting students with special needs in an integrated classroom, such as sequestering them from the rest of the class, can feel discriminatory to the pupil in question. Another group also brought up the fact that sometimes inclusion is practiced in a municipality to save money rather than because it is in the best interest of the child. However, this is against the spirit of Article 3, which states that a child's best interest shall be the most important factor in decision-making. Two of the pre-service teachers noted:

Does that pupil feel that they are being discriminated against, if you put that folding screen there, and they are not able to see? (Pre-service teacher no. 76).

It should decrease discrimination, but on the other hand it can also increase discrimination from the perspective of a pupil with special needs, because that pupil may be labelled as a troublemaker and it might also highlight his/her constant need for additional support. (Pre-service teacher no. 68.)

Previous studies found that pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are mainly positive and become even more so as they progress in their programme; however, pre-service teachers may have many concerns about the implications of inclusion and their attitudes vary depending on the child, the teacher and the environment-related variables (see Goddard & Evans, 2018; Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008; Woodcock, Hemmings, & Kay, 2012). Pre-service teachers' attitudes are shaped by their personal ex-

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perience and personality traits as well as demographics (e.g. age and gender) and socio-cultural beliefs, values and practices (Florez & Smith, 2009; Goddard & Evans, 2018). It is encouraging to see that the pre-service teachers seemed to be willing to take responsibility for linguistically and culturally diverse students (cf. Florez & Smith, 2009).

All children should have the right to be members of the school community without having to lose their own culture and identity; moreover, their cultural, ethnic and religious background should be respected at school. According to the pre-service teachers, this can be challenging if the values a child receives at home contradict the values of the school. The pre-service teachers felt uncertain about what they are supposed to do if a child's cultural background results in him/her behaving in a manner that is against the rules of the school or wider societal norms. For example, pre-service teachers noted:

The challenge is that you are supposed to meet people as people, but at the same time take into consideration the cultural differences (Pre-service teacher no. 89).

There's no way we can ignore the differences in values et cetera, because there are always differences (Pre-service teacher no. 19).

[According to the child's family values], you don't have to listen to women and women are inferior to men, so the child in question didn't listen to her at all and also told the other students that I'm not listening to [that woman]. How do you root out that kind of behaviour in the classroom? (Pre-service teacher no. 78.)

Overall, according to the collaborative discussions and the posters, the pre-service teachers identified a strong connection between the Rights of the Child and the educational context and teacher's work. A child's rights were seen to be placing different, at times even conflicting, demands on teachers and posing various challenges to their day-to-day work. Most of these challenges are connected to a lack of resources. The participants were concerned that they would be unable to act according to what is in the best interest of every child due to a lack of resources, such as time, required support, adequate number of assistants or appropriate teaching materials. Previous studies also reported similar pre-service teachers' concerns about inclusion (Goddard & Evans, 2018; McCray & McHatton, 2011). The pre-service teachers seemed to be fairly aware of the inequalities in Finnish education concerning the linguistic and cultural rights of students. However, the principles in the Rights of the Child were seen as something that can enrich the curriculum and support teachers in their work by providing a clear framework upon which to make decisions. Overall, the pre-service teachers identified adequate support and resources, the development of teaching practices and teacher education and multi-professional cooperation as prerequisites for fully realising the principles of the Rights of the Child in schools. The pre-service teachers identified their responsibility to act in the best interests of the child; however, they struggled with suggesting solutions to the challenges that posed and acting as active members of society to overcome the barriers.

CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

This article discussed HRE in relation to pre-service teacher education from two points of view. It discussed how pre-service teachers perceive the Rights of the Child and identified the kinds of impact it has on their daily life as teachers, namely how understandable specific articles are and what kinds of

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challenges they see in them. They held different views on the meaning of children's rights and human rights in education and they were unsure about the practical implications of some of the articles in terms of supporting children's development by securing their ability to face their life circumstances. The pre-service teachers also saw that these international conventions are a way to prevent marginalisation of children in societies.

The pre-service teachers felt some of the content of the Rights of the Child was ambiguous. They were also unsure about the practical implications of certain articles, such as a child's right not to be touched against his/her will, even if it is for his/her own good or to protect his/her classmates. The results also indicate that the pre-service teachers felt that the Rights of the Child lacked detailed information about not touching children in a harmful manner, so they were unsure when it was permissible to touch young children in their classrooms. In the workshop, the participants discussed the different aspects to touching or not touching children due to changes in the rules in Finland on how teachers should behave in a situation when they need to protect themselves or when working with aggressive children or those with emotional problems. The pre-service teachers also discussed how providing equal support might be challenging, for example, if one focuses on working with one child at the exclusion of others. The workshop functioned as an ethical supervision session for pre-service teachers, enabling them to consider a second opinion during the discussion. One's opinion and one's right to one's own culture and language were also perceived as ambiguous from a practical perspective. According to the results, it seems that linguistically and culturally responsive education perspectives were challenging for the pre-service teachers. Some of the participants perceived the teacher's job to be complicated, and challenging in that their task consisted of ensuring the general well-being of children and understanding the future effects on their learning.

In terms of the Rights of the Child's connection to teachers' work, the effects on teacher education are clear; every pre-service teacher needs a safe place to construct their concepts and ideas concerning HRE. The functional café model used in this study is based on the idea of producing knowledge in focus group discussions. These discussions provide a supervised context where pre-service teachers can learn more about diverse themes in teacher education programmes.

Based on our results, the opinions of first-year pre-service teachers were fairly narrow when analysing the posters they made during the workshops. While they were able to identify the challenges, they approached human rights from a limited point of view. They found the development and content of teacher education programmes to be essential to addressing those challenges and increasing their knowledge about inclusion and cultural and linguistic diversity. For example, teacher education should include more topics on discrimination and how to prevent bullying at school. However, while seeing that a teacher plays an essential role in promoting the enhancement of children's rights, the pre-service teachers were unable to state how they could promote the realisation of those rights, such as inclusivity, in their teaching practices. This issue is where pre-service teachers need more guidance and help from teacher educators.

Corroborating the findings reported by Boutros (2018), our results indicate that the learning café method was a practical way to introduce the pre-service teachers to human rights, but it was insufficient in helping them know how to apply this knowledge in teaching. In the future, it is important to consider how pre-service teachers could be better guided to think about how to apply their knowledge of human rights with their students. Pre-service teachers need theoretical and practical knowledge about human rights and related topics, such as inclusion. When pre-service teachers acquire more knowledge and apply those skills in practice during the teacher education programme, they gain confidence and their concerns and fears might disappear over time. It is important to remember that the pre-service teachers were first-

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year students in the teacher education programme. In this phase of the programme, pre-service teachers' reflections tend to be descriptive and narrow when they are only practicing more analytic thinking.

Future research should focus more on different aspects of pre-service teachers' knowledge of human rights to obtain more in-depth information about their views. It would be essential to also study the perceptions and ideas of the teacher educators that are responsible for designing teacher education curriculum.

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