

## **Does teaching children about human rights, encourage them to practice, protect and promote the rights of others?**

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### Short Biography

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of the article is to demonstrate how the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Rights Respecting Schools Award makes positive contributions to children's lives and experiences at school. Within the overall context of education as a right, the Award supports children to learn about their rights and the rights of others. By learning through a rights-based framework, children experience a rights-based approach to education and start to become active rights thinkers and rights holders. This article presents findings regarding the lived experiences of children participating in a rights education programme from a primary school in England. The results are consistent with previous rights education research and confirm that teaching and supporting the human rights of children to children, through a rights education programme, encourages children to practice, protect and promote the rights of others within their school.

**Keywords:** children's rights; lived experiences; Rights Respecting Schools Award; rights education; UNCRC.

### **Introduction**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC or Convention) (United Nations 1989) is an international treaty signed by all countries of the world, except the USA, which sets out the fundamental human rights of all children. The Convention is, "...the most comprehensive, widely known and generally accepted articulation of school children's rights across the world" (Lundy 2012, 395). The UK signed up to the Convention in December 1991. Each signatory country is periodically reviewed by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child to monitor compliance with the Convention, and a periodic report is produced where non-compliance with the Convention is identified and recommendations made to the country for action to be taken (Lundy 2007).

To support the implementation of the Convention and to further knowledge of it, UNICEF UK has introduced a Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA). The overall purpose of the

RRSA is to provide a framework to support schools in the UK to embed the Convention into the philosophy and values of a school and thus to support all children to realise their full potential (UNICEF 2009). A study was carried out with children and staff at a primary school in Hull, England, that had previously been awarded level 1 UNICEF UK RRSA in 2012, and was working towards meeting the criteria for level 2. The Rights Respecting School Award level 2 requires schools to "... fully embed the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into its ethos and curriculum across all areas", to provide evidence of how the school community are teaching and learning 'about rights through rights', and to provide examples of how the children and adults are becoming 'ambassadors for rights' (UNICEF 2009). It is important to instil with children knowledge and awareness about human rights as a general social objective, but also it is a key part of the UK's obligations under the Convention.

Over the years, the UK has been criticised by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child for failing to engage children in emerging children's rights issues. One of the issues identified in the last examination of the UK was bullying (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child 2008). Although bullying within schools "remains a serious and widespread problem .... and is damaging children's successful engagement in learning" (UK Children's Commissioners 2015), UNICEF UK recently acclaimed that "98% of head teachers believe that RRSA has had a positive impact on relationships and behaviour," which reduced bullying (UNICEF 2015). This provides us with a clear example of how the RRSA can not only meet the UK's obligations under the Convention but demonstrates the impact that teaching children about rights can have on a school environment.

The main aim of this research project was to explore the perspectives of rights with children who attend a Rights Respecting School. A participatory research method was chosen to capture the children's unique viewpoints and their perspectives on their lived experiences of learning about children's rights and their experiences of being rights holders in a primary school. Developing a rights-based approach to participation and collaboration with children required clear communication on all matters during the research project, specifically in ways appropriate to their capabilities and wishes (Kellett et al. 2004). The project was aligned to Articles 12, 13 and 17 of the Convention, regarding respecting, supporting and guiding children to form their views from accessing reliable and appropriate sources of information and expressing these views freely (UNICEF 2009). The perspectives of the children

participating in this research project support the findings from UNICEF UK. This article presents comments from the children that demonstrate that they recognise themselves as rights holders; they are aware of the Convention and they consider that the behaviour of children at their school has improved due to the school participating in a rights education programme.

### ***The Convention on the Rights of the Child***

The Convention contains 54 Articles in total. Articles 1 to 42 outline the rights of the child and Articles 43 to 54 provide details on how adults and governments are required to uphold these rights. The Articles are an 'aspirational' set of values and beliefs, and they are legally enforceable through a range of international law mechanisms and through domestic law if a country has brought it into the domestic legal system. The four Children's Commissioners in the UK are actively calling for the adoption of the Convention into domestic legislation, which would make children's rights recognised and legally binding in the UK (UK Children's Commissioners 2011; UK Children's Commissioners 2015). In 2012, the Coalition Government in the UK gave an assurance to give due consideration to the Articles of the Convention for all new policy and legislation (Cabinet Office 2012).

The Convention emphasises the need for government action to be directed at the actual lived experiences of the child and states that children should be part of the processes regarding decisions that will impact upon their lives (Burchill and Dunhill 2014). "The right of all children to be heard and taken seriously constitutes one of the fundamental values of the Convention" (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child 2009, 3). Conforming to the Convention provides a moral basis for giving a voice to children. There are clear guidelines within the Convention that governments should adhere to. The Convention can also be a tool for measurement and critique facilitating a discussion about how children should be treated (Burchill and Dunhill 2014). A recent consultation document from the Office of the English Children's Commissioner identified a lack of "rights language" within the current education system in England (Office of the Children's Commissioner 2014). According to Articles 29 and 42 of the Convention, all signatories to the Convention are required to educate children about their rights (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child 1989). However, the language and statements within the Articles can be seen as ambiguous and gives rise to different interpretations by various governments and organisations (Gerber 2008).

Some critics believe that children do not require specific rights and examples are often given where children use their rights to demand a whole range of ‘wants’ rather than ‘needs’ from the state or take their parents to court. Although cases of children suing parents for trivial matters have been internationally publicised ( Zurcher 2014; Kaslow 1990), previous research supports the view that teaching children about their rights does not lead to children taking their parents to court or ‘unruly children’ (Covell 2010). Covell and Howe (1999) argue that children who participate in a rights-based education programme develop a breadth of profound understanding of their experiences as rights holders. Research on rights education in schools in Canada identified that children who were taught about rights and encouraged to participate as rights holders acknowledged that the ‘needs’ of a child was central to the rights of the child (Covell et al. 2010). The children who did not participate in the rights-based education programme acknowledged rights in terms of ‘wants’ (Covell et al. 2010). Therefore, children who have an understanding of rights and lived experiences as a rights holder, acknowledge rights as essential.

There have been tensions from parents and governments, where the lack of enforceability of the Convention within the UK has led to avoidance in prioritising teaching children about their rights. The justification being that ‘in the best interests of the child’ children do not need to be educated about their rights; they need protection (Jones and Walker 2011). Critics also state that by having rights, the child must accept responsibilities. This would then require the child to be a duty bearer, which is not a component of a child’s rights based approach. This implies that the child can have rights if they accept explicit responsibilities and does not clearly inform the child of their universal rights (Jerome et al. 2015). However, as Hart (1997) states, these criticisms are from misinterpretations as nowhere in the Convention does it state that children should be educated to have responsibilities nor does it say that the rights of the child eliminate the rights of parents (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child 1989). Supporters of children’s rights firmly assert that children have rights which adults, and governments have a responsibility to uphold. The Convention states that children themselves are holders of rights, and they are not possessions of their parents or the state. Children are not people-in-the-making, they are worthy individuals now, with views, feelings and rights (UK Children’s Commissioners 2015; Burchill and Dunhill 2014; Kellett 2011; Covell 2010; Newell 2000). Children require time to be children and through appropriate

guidance and support will develop the self-confidence that they will need as adults when they assume the responsibilities of adulthood (Lundy 2007).

Evaluations of rights education programmes with primary school-age children has been consistently positive in Canada and the UK. These rights education programmes have been developed based on the Convention. The UNICEF UK RRSA is a rights education programme in the UK, based on the principles of human rights outlined in the Convention (UNICEF 2009). The RRSA not only provides an understanding of human rights, specifically the rights of children but also includes learning and experiencing being a rights holder (UNICEF 2009). Tibbits (1997) advocates that rights education programmes for children, should not only provide uncomplicated, unambiguous information on the specific rights all children have but should also empower children to respect, protect and promote the rights of others.

### ***The UNICEF UK Rights Respecting Schools Award***

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) UK Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA) is a rights education programme based on the principles of human rights. These are equality, dignity, respect, non-discrimination and participation (UNICEF 2009). From 2004, a small number of schools in the UK began to work towards these principles within the framework of the RRSA (Sebba and Robinson 2010). Currently, over 4000 schools in the UK are working towards levels one or two of this award (UNICEF 2015). The framework fully incorporates the Convention and requires schools to integrate these principles into the school's ethos and culture to support all children in the school to reach their full potential through a right based framework. Evidence to meet the four standards that make up the Award is collated by the school and externally assessed by UNICEF UK (UNICEF 2009). Working towards the RRSA can encourage and promote the rights of others. The process requires a whole school approach and the active involvement of the children, teachers and parents (UNICEF 2009).

A rights education programme can provide children with a clear link to understanding and the realisation of their rights and the rights of others within the school, within the community, and globally (UNICEF 2009). After gaining the Award, a school can then call itself a *Rights Respecting School*. This Award continues for three years in which time a school must be

reassessed. This timeframe is to ensure that both children and staff are continuing to learn about human rights, and are practicing and promoting the rights of the child (UNICEF 2009). There is a financial cost to the school for both levels of the Award.

An evaluation assessing the impact of RRSA by Sebba and Robinson (2010) in Hampshire, England, found that children from the schools who achieved the RRSA had a better understanding of their rights, of the rights of others and the Convention. This was evident in the rights-respecting language used by the children during the evaluation. The schools in their study reported a reduction in bullying and an increase in positive relationships and attitudes to diversity. The evaluation includes a range of examples where the children demonstrated rights-respecting attitudes and practices including resolving conflicts among themselves and showing awareness of local and global issues through campaigning and fundraising (Sebba and Robinson 2010). Furthermore, in the majority of the schools, it was reported that the children's engagement in learning improved (Sebba and Robinson 2010). Covell (2010) carried out research on school engagement within 18 schools, including some of the Rights Respecting Schools that were later involved in the Sebba and Robinson evaluation. She found that the rights education programme was successful in engaging pupils, affirming that children were more engaged in the learning process in Rights Respecting Schools and recommended that teaching children about human rights should be a component of primary education (Covell 2010).

## **Methodology**

The aim of the research project was to demonstrate that teaching and supporting the human rights of children to children, through a rights education programme, encourages children to practice, protect and promote the rights of others. To achieve the project aim, a participatory research method was chosen to develop a research partnership between the children and the researcher, which supported and encouraged the children to shape and steer the project. This method develops the children's confidence and self-esteem through encouraging them to influence the research process and embrace the role of co-researcher (Groundwater-Smith et al. 2015; Greene and Hogan 2005; Sinclair and Franklin 2000; Kirby 1999). The method aligns to and promotes the Convention, especially Article 12, which upholds the child's right to express their views on matters affecting them. Participatory research with children is more than supporting children to take part, it demonstrates to the child that their ideas and

perspectives are valued, it also gives the researcher a unique perspective on the lived experiences of children. Greene and Hill (2005) support this view and state that,

*The researcher who values children's perspectives and wishes to understand their lived experiences will be motivated to find out more about how children understand and interpret, negotiate and feel about their daily lives (2005, 3).*

The method provided a framework for the researcher to enhance the children's understanding of the 'rights of the child', through the continual links made by the researcher to the Convention when introducing or discussing elements of the process. The 'rights of the child' formed the professional and moral position the researcher took while researching with children. This is not only a child's entitlement but something that adults are required to do by international law (Freeman 2002). Throughout the research project, the children were supported and encouraged to be proactive and to co-produce and influence the research (Clark et al. 2014; Barker and Weller 2003).

During the research project, the children identified and planned three activities where they could demonstrate their understanding of children's rights. These were:

- A 'walk and talk' tour of school and grounds. This involved one child from each year group who was a member of the Rights Respecting Working Group taking the researcher on a tour of the school and pointing out specific areas, posters, displays and activities that demonstrated to them that their school was a Rights Respecting School. The teacher responsible for leading on RRSA in the school also joined this event. The researcher asked questions during the tour to clarify the points the children were making.
- Rights Respecting Working Group meetings. All group discussions were recorded and transcribed to capture the language used by the children to explain their understanding of children's rights and their experiences as rights holders.
- Children presenting at workshops. Notes were made by the researcher during two workshops to capture the language used by the children while presenting their understandings of children's rights and when answering questions from the adults attending the workshops.

### ***Participants and ethical considerations***



The research project involved the schools' Rights Respecting Working Group, which consisted of 17 children, age between 5 and 11 years old, and two members of the teaching staff. Appropriate ethical approval was gained. This included seeking informed consent from all the participants (Alderson and Morrow 2004) including the children. Within this article, the children's names have been changed to ensure anonymity. However, their exact ages are included to present the different lived experiences within the group.

### *Outline of the research project*

The research project began with the children from the Respecting Rights Working Group, agreeing to participate in the research project. The idea was discussed initially with the head teacher and lead teacher for the Award, who then presented the idea to the children. The children decided that they all wanted to participate in the research project. To achieve the project aim, the following objectives were agreed with the Respecting Rights Working Group. (1) The children would demonstrate their understandings of what the rights of the child meant to them through a 'walk and talk' tour of the school, during various meetings that the researcher was invited to, during informal conversations and throughout the children's rights workshops at the conference; and (2) The children would promote the rights of the child to others within the local community.

At the meetings with the Rights Respecting Working Group the children were asked how they wanted their experiences and understanding of the rights of the child and the Rights Respecting Schools Award to be promoted and shared outside of the school. This was to support the development of evidence for the school to achieve level 2 of the Award. The researcher explained that there was an opportunity to present this topic at a local conference later that year and asked the children if they would like to participate in the workshop. Although this was not an original idea from the children, it was an event that offered the children an opportunity to produce and influence the research. The children unanimously agreed it was a good idea and all the children in the Rights Respecting Working Group wanted to participate. The workshop was attended by professionals working within children's services across the region. They included teachers, teaching assistants, nursery nurses, social workers, family support workers and health professionals. A small number of undergraduate degree students from local universities studying childhood also attended.

Due to the popularity of the RRSA workshop, the children agreed to offer the workshop twice and divided themselves into two groups. The children had decided at previous Rights Respecting Working Group meetings, what activity they wanted to present and what resources they required. During the workshops, the children explained to the adults about the Rights Respecting Award, and led an activity on identifying ‘children’s rights situations’.

After the conference, a further two meetings were held with the Rights Respecting Working Group to allow the researcher to present the attendees feedback to the group and to discuss and analyse this. During these meetings, the children commented on their experiences of disseminating their knowledge of children’s rights to adults.

## **Findings and discussion**

This section will present the key findings from the research project, and explanations for these findings will be framed within the context of the project aims, objectives and relevant literature. It will specifically outline the children’s perspectives of how they practice, protect and promote human rights. These are presented in clusters of comments from the children that provide a breadth of the range of statements the children made during the research project. The examples of comments are drawn from the activities the children chose to participate in, where they demonstrated their understanding of being a rights holder; treated those around them with dignity and fairness, protected others and disseminated knowledge of human rights. Before discussing any implications of these results, it should be acknowledged that this is one school. Nonetheless, there are reasons to assume that these findings are significant and meaningful.

### ***Exploring the perspectives of rights with children who attend a Rights Respecting School***

The Convention states that all children should be made aware that they are rights holders (UNICEF 2009). The children demonstrated on many occasions their understanding of being a rights holder. This was evident during the ‘walk and talk’ tour of the school and grounds, during various discussions and during their presentations and conversations at the workshops. For example, during all of the activities at the school, the children made a point of identifying and explaining the school’s Class Charters. These are a set of rules explicitly aligned to the

Convention that every child in each class has created and agreed to. They are on the walls of every classroom. The children's comments included,

It tells you the rights we have in the school. Like you have the right to learn and the right to be safe and all the rights to play and relax and have fun, Jenny, age 5.

Our Class Charter is up there, and it's got the headline 'Rights'. And then these are all the rights that are suitable for the classroom. And then it's got how we respect these...., we listen to each other, we do our best, and we speak to others how we wish to be spoken to. All of us as a class chose these. Shaheen, age 10.

The children also pointed out and explained the UNICEF posters (with the Articles of the Convention listed) and said,

It's got all our rights on it and the word we use on it is 'respect' .....Altogether we've got 42 rights, and each class has got their own Charter, Shaheen, age 10.

There are 42 rights for children, but altogether there are 54, Anil, age 11.

We've got all our rights in school, but we've also got our rights outside, like in the playground, so whenever anyone's playing we still keep our rights. Kerrie, age 10.

On this side we've got Article 7, Shaheen, age 10. [When asked, what is Article 7?] Your right to have a name and a nationality because like now we've all got our name because no one will just call us 'she' or 'he'. We've all got names, and we've got a right to be called those name. And Nationality is like where you come from because I'm from a different place than Ann but that doesn't mean I can be mean to her, we've still got the right, Shaheen, age 10.

We don't have responsibilities in the classroom but rights, and we use the word 'respect' instead, Shaheen, age 10. [When asked, why don't you use the word 'responsibilities?]  
Because 'responsibilities' is of like a role but when you've got your rights you've always got them there, Shaheen, age 10.

Throughout all the activities the children continually discussed and debated their rights as children, as rights holders and the rights of others. This was more evident during the recorded Rights Respecting Working Group meetings and at the workshops with the professionals working in children's services. The children identified positive lived experiences from participating in the RRSA and gave examples of how things have improved at the school.

Having the rights stops arguments, Max, age 7.

It's much more a good environment, because when you're walking around its nice because no one's fighting anymore and more people are playing with each other. Anil, age 11.

Children now let other children join in the group. Max, age 7.

The silly arguments are stopping because more children are referring to the rights that they know they have like when you've got a tie, and someone takes it off you, that wasn't rights-respecting. Jenny, age 5.

Before we started the Rights Respecting group, it used to be children used to start fighting for simple reasons. Kerrie, age 10

The comments from the children, confirm the conclusions from Sebba and Robinson's evaluation (2010) who found that the RRSA empowered children to promote and discuss rights. The children identified that rights are about taking responsibilities but never commented that to gain rights they had to take responsibility. This is an interesting finding as much of the criticism regarding teaching children about their rights is accompanied by the statement that children should be given responsibilities to gain rights (Jerome et al. 2015; Hart 1997).

The children gave examples where they supported each other and looked after each other. They saw a link between being rights holders and how that had stopped or reduced the fighting in the playground. They also wanted to continue to support the rights of all children in the school and identified the positive effect that learning about rights had on improving relationships between children and improving the behaviour of children. This indicates that the school has integrated the values and beliefs of the Convention into the everyday activities as required by a school working towards level 2 of the RRSA (UNICEF 2009) and supports UNICEF UK's claim that the RRSA has a positive impact on children's relationships and behaviour in school (UNICEF 2015).

The RRSA level 2 requires the children to recognise and become global citizens, a participant in the global world (UNICEF 2009). However, the children's activities and efforts are also still encouraged locally as the important thing about supporting and encouraging children as rights holders, is that it starts from where the individual is. It begins with the individual,

within a family, a school and moves out to the community and potentially into the wider world.

Findings from this research project demonstrate that the children recognise that human rights include aspects such as physical survival. For example, they identified the human 'need' for food; water; not to be tortured; not be beaten up by others. A term used in the Convention is 'human dignity' and that is about being a human being (UNICEF 2009). For example, identifying that a human being can learn about things; can understand things; can develop as an individual; can get a job; support others and create new rights.

The children commented,

In Sierra Leone some people are poor they have to work, they shouldn't have to work because they are children. And this boy called Daniel, we watched a video, and he had to work 8 hours in a mine, and he could've got hurt, and then he would've got infected by things and the rocks could've fallen on top of him, and he could've died. Kerrie, age 10.

On our display, it's trying to say even though we are different it doesn't mean we can't be friends and visit. We all have rights but in some places, some children don't have as many rights as we do. Shaheen, age 10.

We started watching different clips like about children who were slaves and who were forced to like child labour and things, and then we wrote in our books what was wrong and how we could change it. Like at Easter we had chocolate not with children making it, or slaves and we made sure it wasn't doing that because we are a Rights Respecting School. Anil age 11.

Because you need water, you need clean food, and you need freedom from slavery. Jenny, age 5.

Like you have a right to freedom from slavery, so it's not really being met if you have to go through child labour. Anil, age 11.

The children demonstrated a clear awareness that all human beings are rights holders. The examples the children gave regarding 'chocolate', 'child labour' and 'slavery' indicated that they have a developing level of empathy for human beings who they perceive as not having their rights upheld. They are also demonstrating their understanding that everyone is a rights holder by practising what they believe in a meaningful way to them. The children were very proud as they described their actions at Easter time when they chose not to buy chocolate that

was linked to child labour. Discussions regarding such topics can be very complicated and the language used may not be fully understood by children. However, for the children to have this perception and be empowered to protect and promote the rights of others, it would indicate that the school has provided the children with simple and unambiguous information (Tibbits 1997).

The children also demonstrated an awareness of the difference between human ‘needs’ and human ‘wants’. The children identified that human rights are about the physical survival, and human dignity of the person, of them as human beings and that was important to them. The displays the children had created around the school, to promote and support the rights of the child, demonstrated an awareness of the child as a human being and messages across the school were portrayed to respect other human beings. The children’s comments align with the ‘best interest of the child’ and identify their understandings of rights as needs, which is comparable to the research findings from the Covell et al. (2010) research in Canadian schools.

The children commented,

This is our Class Charter and all of Class Four wrote their name on it to agree to respect the rights of others, and we put it up in our classroom for everyone to see. Anne, age 9.

This is our Playground Charter. We’ve got about 3 or 4 copies of these. There’s one here near the entrance of where the younger children come out so their parents can see. When children are playing on the field, there’s a couple there... In the classroom, we have certain rights that fit in with us and ...whenever anyone’s playing they’ve got a right to relax and play, Anne, age 9.

We also need a Playground Charter because children know they need the rights in school and at home. So it’s a good way to help children learn that they’ve got rights no matter what. Shaheen, age 10.

So if someone wants to play, they have a right to play, and everyone shares the toys, Jenny, age 5.

And Article 2, all children have these rights no matter what, so all of these rights are on there, everyone has them so no one can take them away from you, Kerrie, age 10.

All children need to know about their rights. Jenny, age 5.

Because they have got rights no matter what. Shaheen, age 10.

We do a 'what you need and what you want' activity. Like, everyone wants a phone, that's what you want, but you need food to stay alive, and they always think that you always need like an X-Box or something, but you actually need food more than that. Shaheen, age 10.

We learn stuff about rights. In World Water Day we found out that people like in Africa or other places didn't have clean water. Kevin, age 6.

From the range of explanations and comments from the children, it is clear that they have an enhanced moral understanding and support for global justice. They demonstrated their lived experiences as rights holders and identified examples of role modelling and respecting each other. They were confident in giving their explanations, their 'voice' regarding the RRSA and about the rights of others. They identified the need to listen to allow others to have a 'voice'. These findings clearly indicate that the children have an understanding of human rights, and they have been empowered with the knowledge and confidence to share this information, participate as rights holders and uphold the rights of others. Empowerment is identified by Tibbits (2002) as imperative within rights education programmes. The findings from this small scale study indicate that rights education programmes engage children in emerging children's rights issues. As with UNICEF UK, this study found that the RRSA has had a positive impact on reducing negative behaviour. Although the children did not mention the term 'bullying' many of the examples they gave regarding their experiences before learning about their rights, are associated with bullying behaviour. For example, fighting, arguing, taking things from each other and excluding others.

### ***Promoting the rights of the child to others within the local community***

Tibbits's (2002) concept of empowerment, within rights education programmes, includes having an impact outside the school grounds. During the workshops, the children were confident and presented as empowered rights holders who had a real awareness of the rights of the child and the rights of all human beings. The school has explicitly adopted a child rights approach based on the Convention, and it is evident that a rights-based approach has been embedded in the school policies, practices and culture. This would indicate that the rights education programme has not only provided a clear understanding of human rights (Tibbits 1997), specifically the rights of children but has had a positive impact on the children, not only as rights holders but as upholders of rights (UNICEF 2009).

From the researchers experience of working with the children in this project, there is clear evidence to suggest that a Rights Respecting School can prepare children for future lived experiences within their community and beyond, preparing them to become, ... “rights-respecting global citizens and are advocates for social justice, fairness and children’s rights at home and abroad” (UNICEF 2009). Teaching and supporting the human rights of children to children, through a rights education programme, encourages children to practice, protect and promote the rights of others.

## **Conclusion**

Research consistently confirms that rights education programmes make a positive contribution to the lives of primary age children. The children from the primary school in this research project, as with other children in Rights Respecting Schools, experienced a rights-based approach to education, while learning about their rights and the rights of others. The RRSA provided a framework for children to participate and experience a rights education and practice as rights holders.

The experiences of the children in the school were relevant to their level of understanding; it was supportive, encouraging, safe and respectful. The children were not pressured into participating into any of the activities, and no child was excluded from participating. All children were offered opportunities to get involved in the Award and to evaluate the impact and outcomes of any changes that were made within the school. The discussions and activities that the children chose were not individual or unconnected endeavours. They were part of an overarching ethos the school had adopted to ensure children are encouraged to participate and provide constant dialogue and experience their ‘voice’ being valued. For children in the primary school, being aware that they have the right to be heard in decisions which affect them, for example tackling bullying or bad behaviour in the school, developed not only their sense of wellbeing but also their self-confidence. This, in turn, encouraged, supported and empowered them to claim their rights and to campaign for the rights of others.

The research project enabled and facilitated the children to become role models and facilitators of knowledge and experience as rights holders, organising and presenting the workshops in the community. Their lived experiences as rights holders and their knowledge of children’s rights was not only disseminated to their peers, family and friends but also to the wider community of adults who attended the workshops. The attendees were either



studying childhood or, as with the majority, working directly with children. The research project confirmed that the children in the primary school are practising, protecting and promoting their rights and the rights of others, they are understanding and realising their potential, not only in the school but their community and globally.

This project was carried out in one primary school. However, it demonstrates the success of rights education programmes such as RRSA and has identified, through the children's comments, the benefits perceived by the children. There is an emergent evidence base that is consistent with Tibbits's (2002; 1997), Covell's (2010), Covell and Howe's (1999) and Sebba, and Robinson's (2010) analysis that confirms that teaching and supporting the human rights of children to children, through a rights education programme, encourages children to practice, protect and promote the rights of others within their school. It would be interesting to carry out further research projects with these children when they transfer to other schools that may or may not be Rights Respecting Schools. After they leave the primary school will the children independently sustain or enhance their understanding of rights? Will they continue to see themselves as rights holders and confidently express this within a school where very little or no rights education has taken place? Will they continue to empower other with their knowledge of rights? A Rights Respecting Primary School may be the safe environment that children require to develop rights knowledge, practice as rights holders and protect and promote the rights of others.

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