

Chapter 2

Children's Rights Education for the Early Childhood Education and Care Student



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Abstract Children's rights education is an approach that takes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as its starting point for guiding educators' decision-making processes, pedagogies and practices. Celebrating its 30-year anniversary in 2019, this international human rights treaty can and should be understood by governments, policymakers, activists, educators and children alike. Since it was adopted in 1989, there have been consistent calls for training and education on children's rights for all professionals who work with and for children. This chapter draws upon empirical findings from the author's doctoral study (Long, Children's rights education in the early years: an exploration of the perspectives of undergraduate students. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, 2017) and a selective review of the literature on children's rights education (CRE) to position the early childhood education and care (ECEC) student as a future duty-bearer under Article 29 of the UNCRC. To consider the implications of this crucial relationship for the rights of infants and young children in ECEC settings, the author also draws upon relevant commentary by the monitoring body of the UNCRC – the Committee on the Rights of the Child, contemporary legal scholarship and, finally, the literature on CRE and human rights education. This commentary is used to examine the meanings a group of undergraduate students – in a BA (Hons) Early Childhood Education and Care program in one higher education institute (HEI) in the Republic of Ireland – ascribe to children's rights and the ECEC practices they choose to illuminate their views. The findings reveal gaps in knowledge and understanding of the children's rights framework which suggests the need for CRE that is deeply contextualised to ECEC. More intentional teaching can enable students to understand and apply a child-rights based approach to the care and education of babies and young children.

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Introduction

Early childhood, as defined by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (hereafter, the Committee) spans the child's first 8 years of life, incorporating infancy, the preschool years and the early years of primary school (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2006). It is commonly argued that early childhood education and care (ECEC) is not an explicit right under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), particularly as Article 28 refers to compulsory primary education. However, the Committee has interpreted the right to education as beginning at birth and closely linked to the achievement of young children's maximum development, as guaranteed in Articles 6 (2) and 29 (1) which outline the aims or qualities of that education (see appendices for full text of these and subsequent articles). These rights act as enablers or multipliers for other rights and so have particular implications for the civil, social and political rights of babies and very young children (Lundy & Tobin, 2018).

Children's rights education (CRE) is a right under Article 29 (1). Article 29 requires the explicit teaching of children's rights in ways that model respect for child rights as enshrined in the UNCRC (Jerome et al., 2015; Kapai et al., 2014). As a cornerstone of CRE, the succinct and unambiguous language of Article 42 obliges States Parties (governments) to make provisions for the dissemination of the UNCRC to both adults and children. States Parties commit to making the principles and provisions of the UNCRC widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike (Article 42, UNCRC, 1989).

This particular obligation, however, tends to be more commonly recognised by governments for primary and secondary school aged children and their educators (Jerome et al., 2015). From a child rights perspective, this narrow approach is problematic, as babies and young children also have the same rightful entitlements as older children, recognised by the UNCRC (Freeman, 2000). Largely absent from these debates are the perspectives of ECEC students. This chapter makes a contribution to addressing this gap.

The lack of impact of the UNCRC on ECEC programs, curricula and practice in some contexts has been noted (Di Santo & Kenneally, 2014; Pardo & Jadue, 2018; Robson, 2016). The responsibility of educators – in this case, ECEC educators – to educate young children as holders of human rights has not been given sufficient attention in research (Brantefors & Quennerstedt, 2016; Quennerstedt, 2016). Furthermore, research suggests more needs to be known about the extent to which, or in what ways, ECEC educators gain knowledge and understanding of children's rights to enable them to enact these rights in their everyday practice with babies and young children (Pardo & Jadue, 2018; Brantefors & Quennerstedt, 2016; Robson, 2016).

Children's Rights in Early Childhood

The UNCRC has been widely recognised as a driver of the paradigm shift in childhood research (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012), transforming the image of the child from an object to a subject of rights. This shift has been widely embraced by ECEC scholarship. Participation has emerged as a particularly strong theme in the literature, and understandings of Article 12 have been used to inform and advance methodologies and ethical frameworks for participatory research and practice with young children (see, for example, Bae, 2010; Kanyal, 2014; Mayne et al., 2018). However, a preoccupation with the participation rights of young children, in particular in early childhood research, has been noted by Quennerstedt (2016). Quennerstedt argues that such a narrow rights orientation could weaken the connection between viewing children's rights as part of the overall international human rights system. This, in turn, could hamper national contexts, reducing the wider range of children's rights knowledge and capacities available for ECEC educators to consider.

Children's Rights Education

There is now a growing body of literature on effective CRE, which has built upon earlier human rights education models (Jerome et al., 2015; Kapai et al., 2014). CRE should be understood in a broad sense, far beyond the subject of a lesson plan. It entails teaching and learning about the provisions and principles of the UNCRC, as well as the *child rights approach*, to help empower both children and adults to take action and put children's rights into practice in their day-to-day lives – at home, at school, in the community and, more broadly, at the national and global levels. CRE is learning *about* rights, learning *through* rights (using rights as an organising principle to transform the culture of learning) and learning *for* rights (taking action to realise rights) (UNICEF, 2014).

Although designed for all kind of contexts, this definition raises interesting questions about the purpose, content and methods of CRE for babies and young children. What might be considered appropriate for educators and the children they work with needs to be defined by the profession itself, and contextualised to local conditions, cultures and resources (Jerome, 2016). In early childhood, motives for teaching and learning about rights include encouraging involvement (Bae, 2010; Theobald et al., 2011) and developing children's agency (Smith, 2007). However, other emphases for CRE have been identified, which have not, to a great extent, been the focus of early childhood research. These include awareness-raising, citizenship, respect for rights and social change (Brantefors & Quennerstedt, 2016). CRE is also necessary for the professionals who work with children. The complexity of the task requires more explicit, transformational models or frameworks for educators themselves (Waldron et al., 2011), and more systematic engagement from the wider

ECEC community, in order to prepare ECEC students for their role as future duty-bearers (Pardo & Jadue, 2018).

The Child Rights Approach in Early Childhood

For ECEC educators, knowledge about how the UNCRC interacts with national law, policy and practice is central to CRE – and this exposure should be comprehensive and interdisciplinary. Definitions and terms commonly referred to in ECEC literature – such as the child rights-based approach, best interests, evolving capacity, views of the child, non-discrimination, life, survival and development – tend not to be firmly grounded in the UNCRC or legal scholarship, but rather draw on alternative disciplines, which are then appraised for their application to local contexts. Definitions, which include discussion of government obligations, can be derived from the human rights-based approach and should consider the following elements as central: education and care must further the realisation of child rights as laid down in the UNCRC and other international human rights instruments; and children’s rights standards and principles must be used to guide behaviour, actions, policies and programs. This approach simultaneously builds the capacity of babies and young children as rights-holders to claim their rights, and the capacity of duty-bearers (state actors) to fulfil their obligations (UNICEF, 2014). However, there is a risk that such definitions may lead to a top-down approach to CRE by state actors, which would be insufficient for a full realisation of children’s rights.

Consistent with high quality ECEC, the child rights-based approach includes respect for young children’s participation, their best interests, development to their fullest potential and non-discrimination. Central to understanding the importance of this approach for babies and young children is the principle of evolving capacities. This principle, derived from Article 5 which relates to adult guidance, has been emphasised by the Committee as the process whereby children progressively acquire understanding about their rights and how they can best be realised. This core concept, with strong links to child development and growing maturity, plays a balancing role between autonomy and protection, and it is directly related to all other rights (Lundy & Hanson, 2017). For example, in early childhood contexts, while children must not be expected to perform or take responsibility at levels beyond their capacity – such as learning to read, making decisions about their future, or crossing the road – they are entitled to take responsibility for and participate in decisions and activities over which they do have competence (Lansdown, 2005). CRE for ECEC educators is therefore necessary to build the capacity of future duty-bearers, in the first instance ECEC students, so that they can build the capacity of babies and young children to progressively engage with their rights and the rights of others (Jerome et al., 2015). In this way, babies and young children can learn about their rights in an appropriate and active way, in a rights-compliant environment, where the climate and all the practices and pedagogies of the educators are grounded in the children’s rights framework (Lundy & McEvoy, 2008).

The Irish Context

Although CRE is underpinned by clear principles, its implementation is shaped by the diverse national contexts and professional groups to which it applies. This can and should lead to radically different processes and outcomes (Jerome, 2016). Since it ratified the UNCRC in 1992, the Irish Government has made steady progress in actions to ensure the realisation of rights for all children at legislative, policy and institutional levels. A referendum in 2012 resulted in the incorporation of the principles of participation and best interests into the Irish Constitution; although somewhat narrow in scope, this has given rise to enforceable rights and duties. Despite this limited incorporation of the UNCRC, all professionals who work with children in Ireland require comprehensive knowledge of these two principles at a minimum to understand their implications for their particular practice contexts (Long, 2019).

It is in the policy sphere, however, where the UNCRC has had most of its impact on ECEC in Ireland. It has helped to shape the contemporary image of the child as an active participant in ECEC and laid out a *blueprint* for how adults can respect and support them (Hayes, 2013). There has been significant incorporation of the principles of participation and best interests in particular – in national policy frameworks (Department of Children and Youth Affairs [DCYA], 2014, 2015, 2018), curricular frameworks (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment [NCCA], 2009), quality frameworks (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education [CECDE], 2006), practice guidance (DCYA, 2016; NCCA, 2019) and associated inspection processes (Department of Education and Skills, 2016). A particular focus of this chapter is the national early childhood curriculum framework, *Aistear*, although not on a statutory footing for all children. Envisaged for children from birth to statutory school age, the framework is richly informed by a plurality of value systems, and it embraces diverse curricula and traditions. It also assumes a common understanding or image of the child that reflects contemporary thought on children as active citizens, as competent and confident learners, as agents with the ability to shape their own identities and worlds and, finally, as rights-holders (Hayes et al., 2013; Waldron et al., 2011).

In general, curricular frameworks tend to include quite limited or abstract references to human rights (Tibbitts & Fernekes, 2011). In the Irish context, however, *Aistear* presents a clear curriculum entitlement for a situated children's rights education.

Help me to learn about my rights and responsibilities. Model fairness, justice and respect when you interact with me. Involve me in making decisions. Let me share my views and opinions with you about things that matter to me. (NCCA, 2009, p. 8)

In the above quote the dual imperatives of Articles 29 (1b) and 42 are made visible while the principle of participation is partially reflected. These education rights can provide children and ECEC educators who are committed to its values, with an ever-open window of opportunity for transformation (Lundy, 2012). However, the language in the quote is problematic from a rights perspective as, for example, rights are not conditional, and care should be taken by educators that it is neither

suggested nor taught that children's rights are dependent on children fulfilling certain responsibilities (Jerome et al., 2015; UNICEF, 2014). To do so could obscure the meaning of entitlements of rights-holders and obligations of duty-bearers, along with other vital components of the child rights-based approach (Jerome et al., 2015). The possibility of some dilution or blurring of concepts demonstrates that constitutional or policy change alone, without accompanying CRE, may leave miseducation unaddressed, hampering full implementation of the UNCRC in practice.

The Study

Located in the children's rights paradigm, the findings of the study (Long, 2017) presented in this chapter had the following feature of children's rights research (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012): in its design it sought to explore government assumptions about the implementation of the UNCRC in ECEC. Such framing, particularly if derived from the text of the UNCRC, along with the commentary, recommendations and concluding observations of the Committee, can also potentially lead to findings that enable governments to meet their reporting obligations under the UNCRC.

Aim

A central principle of a rights-based approach is that actions should contribute to the development of the capacities of duty-bearers – that is, governments and state actors (including future educators) – to meet their obligations, and of rights-holders (babies and young children) to claim their rights. The aim of this study, therefore, was to investigate whether, to what extent and in what ways a group of ECEC undergraduate students in one higher education institution (HEI) in the Republic of Ireland were informed about and understood children's rights through their education. Five focused research questions drove the study:

1. What do a group of ECEC students in one HEI in the Republic of Ireland know and understand about children's rights?
2. How do the ECEC students conceptualise the child in ECEC contexts?
3. Where have this group of ECEC students acquired the knowledge, practices and values required to implement the UNCRC, particularly Articles 28, 29 and 42?
4. Do the ECEC students value children's rights as a knowledge and skills base for their practice with young children?
5. How do the ECEC students frame their role in relation to educating others about children's rights?

Method

As an exploratory study designed to access one group of ECEC students' knowledge and understandings related to children's rights, a methodology that was capable of capturing the richness of participants' interpretations was required (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The research adopted a predominantly convergent, parallel, mixed methods approach comprising a specially designed quantitative questionnaire and focus group discussions (FGDs). For the questionnaire, a series of 21 closed-ended questions asked respondents to provide information based on their qualifications, direct experience with children, knowledge of children's rights instruments, institutions, programs, sources of knowledge on children's rights, attitudes and beliefs about the relevance of children's rights in early childhood, and views on the role of adults in educating other adults and children about children's rights. Three open-ended questions required students to define children's rights, child participation, and how they think children's rights are viewed in early childhood. The topics for the five FGDs were broadly related to exploring students' views of babies and young children as rights-holders, students' views on the enactment of children's rights in early childhood, pedagogies and practices that could support CRE for ECEC students, and students' views on their role in supporting the CRE of both adults and children.

Participants

A purposive sample of ECEC students were selected (see Table 2.1). 144 registered students across Years 1, 2 and 3 of one BA (Hons) Early Childhood Education and Care program were invited to participate. The response rate for the questionnaire was 53.47% ($n = 77$), and respondents were fairly evenly distributed across the three stages of the program. All of the respondents identified as female, and the mean age of the sample was 21.61 years ($SD = 4.23$), with a range from 18 to 38 years. Of the sample, 3.9% ($n = 3$) were international students.

For the qualitative strand, 32 self-selected participants took part in five FGDs, which consisted of the following groupings: Year 1 students, Year 2 students, Year 3 students, students with previous qualifications, mature students (over age 23).

Table 2.1 Research participants

Stage of BA (Hons) Early Childhood Education and Care program	% (n)
Year 1	28.6% ($n = 22$)
Year 2	36.4% ($n = 28$)
Year 3	35.1% ($n = 27$)

Data Analysis

Data from the questionnaire were analysed statistically using SPSS 22. For each of the 70 items on the questionnaire, means and standard deviations were calculated. Aggregate as well as Year 1, Year 2 and Year 3 frequencies were compiled. A number of cross tabulations were also carried out to analyse any relationship between variables such as students' age, previous studies, direct work experience with children and stage of study. The qualitative data generated by the FGDs were analysed thematically, using a six-step inductive process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Three open-ended questions included in the questionnaire were also analysed thematically.

Findings and Analysis

The study found that a BA (Hons) Early Childhood Education and Care program was a firm foundation upon which to embed an appropriate form of CRE for students (see below for further discussion). The interdisciplinary nature of their studies exposes students to a wide range of ECEC knowledges, skills, values and practices through lectures, workshops and professional practice placements. In addition, these findings also shed light on some of the ways babies and very young children experience their rights in everyday routines and rituals in ECEC contexts and the pivotal role of the ECEC educator in realising their rights.

Finding 1

In line with government obligations under Article 42 of the UNCRC, all children and adults need to know about their rights; thus, it is assumed that ECEC students will have gained some awareness of the UNCRC through their primary and secondary school education. ECEC students' exposure to information on the UNCRC and on rights-based concepts, practices and pedagogies as part of their initial practitioner education is presented below. Respondents were asked to self-rate their knowledge of children's rights. For statistical purposes, response categories were combined for analysis. The groups *High* and *Very High* were combined into a *High* knowledge category, and the groups *Neither High nor Low* and *Low* and *Very Low* were combined into a *Low* category. In general, across the years, students from Years 1 and 2 rated their knowledge of children's rights as neither high nor low, or low or very low, while students from Year 3 rated their knowledge as high or very high (see Fig. 2.1).

While there was some evidence of differences across the years, this was not statistically significant, and because this was a cross-sectional study, no evidence of progression over the 3 years of the undergraduate program could be tracked. 40.9%

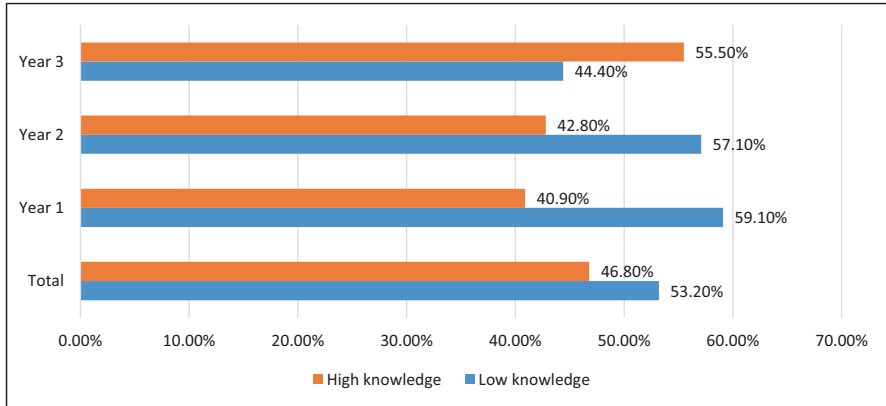


Fig. 2.1 Students' self-rated knowledge of children's rights across the ECEC program

of Year 1 students rated their knowledge of children's rights as high or very high, while 42.8% of Year 2 students rated their knowledge as high or very high and 55.5% of Year 3 students rated their knowledge as high or very high. A chi-square test was conducted to examine whether there were any statistically significant differences in levels of self-reported knowledge of children's rights across the different years involved in the study. Interestingly, 15% more Year 3 students reported high levels of knowledge compared to Year 1 students; however, no statistically significant differences were found [$\chi^2 = 1.313$, $p = .519$].

Final year students, as might be expected, reported much greater knowledge of children's rights. This could be attributable to exposure to more ECEC settings for supervised professional practice, or the content of the Year 3 modules which included a module dedicated to ethics, and the possibility to carry out a research project with children. In addition, for Year 3 students, the ability to critically analyse children's rights within the UNCRC, the European Convention on Human Rights and the Irish Constitution, is an expressed learning outcome of the module Legal Issues for Early Childhood Education, which possibly accounts for their high level of self-reported knowledge of children's rights. However, in the FGDs this particular group of students were unsure of the application of theory to practice. One student suggested her need for more time to recognise and confront contradictions between theory and practice:

I still haven't got my head around it ... there is so much, everyone does something different, and I don't know which is good for the child [and] which is bad.

While the sources and nature of children's rights are vital for students to know from a legal, moral and ethical perspective, it appears that this participant may not have been afforded sufficient time and space to reflect on and reconcile what she had previously been learning with her experience in practice. Without this intention, students can remain uncertain about the implications of the UNCRC for their own practice.

Finding 2

In line with government obligations under Article 29(1b) of the UNCRC, education should be directed towards the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. For babies and young children in ECEC contexts, the realisation of this right is very much dependent on the knowledge base of their educators. Without access to this ever-evolving body of international human rights law, and its history and underpinning philosophy, made accessible and meaningful for ECEC educators in their local contexts, it is likely that students will have some inaccuracies, dilutions and misconceptions of the elements that constitute a child rights-based approach. There is also a risk that ECEC students could learn about child rights in a way that could become detached from the UNCRC (Quennerstedt, 2016).

Students' ability to contextualise some of the principles of the UNCRC to early childhood practice points to their emerging competence in a rights-based approach. Grounded in human relations and interaction, in many respects ECEC students can have an implicit and emerging understanding of some children's rights at the interpersonal level, particularly given the theoretical and practical focus of their program and the values and principles of the national quality and curricular frameworks. For example, students in Years 2 and 3 had undertaken professional practice placements with young children, and so could identify some of the more salient children's rights issues from practice. The UNCRC is a legal articulation of certain core philosophical concepts, one of which is human dignity. One student articulated what dignity and respect in early childhood meant to her, by focusing on young children's personal space.

I think it's like comparing against an adult's right. You wouldn't like someone coming up and wiping your nose or somebody putting on your coat for you ... it's personal space at the end of the day, a child has a right to personal space, regardless of whether they are [aged] two or 20.

Other students in the FGDs were particularly sensitive to the intersection of dignity with issues of privacy. One student described how young children's right to privacy can easily be disregarded in a busy ECEC room, where young children can be moved around by adults without regard for their dignity, participation or evolving capacities. One student gave this example of adult-child interactions in caregiving routines:

Changing the child's nappy in the middle of the room, or if they have an accident, or if they are taking their clothes off in the corner, but in front of everyone in the room ... the child has no privacy.

Unsurprisingly, given the focus of the program, participants viewed treating children with profound dignity on the basis of their humanity as key. However, children's human rights are more than the values or aspirations that underpin them. What distinguishes the child rights-based approach from others is that it draws attention to the duty of the state to respect the right-holder's enjoyment of their rights; thus, a life of dignity for the child is realised through the provision of 54

children's rights standards to which the state is accountable, and empowering the child to claim these rights.

Four guiding principles of the UNCRC (non-discrimination, participation, best interests and survival of the child) are essential to inform a child rights-based approach, providing a flexible framework for ECEC professionals on which to base their pedagogical decision making. Students had an incomplete understanding of two of the guiding principles in particular (participation and best interests), which may impact on their ability to implement a rights-based approach in ECEC contexts, especially when faced with complexity and uncertainty. This was surprising given the level of incorporation of both these principles in the legal and policy domain in Ireland.

Understandings of the principle of participation by the ECEC students tended to fall into two broad categories: narrow or non-convention definitions and those that showed a nascent appreciation of the content of Article 12 and its meaning for this principle. Definitions which showed a limited understanding or imperfectly summarised the principle of participation (Lundy, 2007) tended to include terms such as "taking part", "being involved in activities", "having a go" or "ensuring nobody gets left out". Definitions that showed growing sensitivity to the language of Article 12 included this one:

Children have a right to participate in all decisions and should be taken into consideration on their level of understanding of the issue.

What the findings suggest, however, is that when the principle of participation is reduced to such summaries, certain important elements such as "all matters affecting the child" and "who is capable of forming his or her own views" may get omitted or distorted. In addition, the guiding principle of participation also includes the right to information; however, building the child's capacity to understand issues was rarely mentioned by participants. In addition, little reference was made to the obligation of the adult, to take into account the young child's evolving capacity. The findings also suggest a continued uncomfortable relationship between welfare and rights, whereby some of the participants seem to have absorbed an uncritical understanding of the best interests principle as something inherent in the adult's understanding of what is best for the child in ECEC contexts. Frequently mentioned was the adult's responsibility "to seek what is best for children" or to provide "what the child needs". However, embedded in some explanations of the best interests principle were ideas that suggested paternalistic attitudes towards children, used to legitimise restricting children's participation in decision-making processes. One respondent explained their understanding thus:

Children should be given choice in decisions in most but not all cases, where [the] adult knows best for the child.

Despite guidance and emphasis on the best interests principle in the national policy framework, it appeared to be difficult for students to define this principle and relate it to their practice. This is not surprising given the imprecise nature of the principle.

Indeed, this too was recognised by one participant as “sometimes it is hard for the adult to know what the best interests [of the child] are”.

The right to life, survival and development of the child (Article 6) was closely conceptualised with the right to play, rest and leisure (Article 31). What constituted an appropriate balance between adult- and child-initiated play was a recurrent topic across the data set. Many expressed beliefs that young children learned through play in ECEC contexts, and they further differentiated play as what children freely choose to do, at their own level, while activities are something that “practitioners have set up for them to do”. Students showed an appreciation for adults sometimes sharing the lead with children, in line with both Articles 5 and 6. One student described using her knowledge and expertise to plan appropriate learning experiences for children.

Doing something to get them to learn and develop in specific areas ... take playdough – that’s certainly aimed at developing the fine and gross motor skills, and maybe their imagination and creativity, it’s all there.

Participants were also cognisant of pressures on play with regard to time-keeping, parental expectations and the requirements of external agencies. They noted tensions between adult-made routines and adult concerns and priorities which can unintentionally disregard children’s interests and learning and miss opportunities to build children’s capacities to be involved in the decision-making processes of the setting. One questionnaire respondent replied:

Early years services are so focused on time-keeping, and tend to neglect what the children want to do, whether it is to keep playing with water or not.

The extent to which babies and young children can claim their rights in line with their evolving capacity is very much dependent on their ECEC educators. The assumption that ECEC educators know about the children’s rights framework and the child rights-based approach needs further examination. It is clear from these findings that misconceptions, misinformation, narrow interpretations and gaps can dilute the full meaning of a child rights-based approach during the professional formation of ECEC educators. Quennerstedt (2016) suggests a skew in the ECEC literature towards participation rights, and this may have contributed to an unintentional silencing of other important elements, and a less than full engagement with all the other principles and provisions of the UNCRC. As all rights are interconnected, interdependent and interrelated, this situation needs to be rectified.

As adults, studying in a program that will equip them to practise professionally in ECEC contexts, an assumption could be made that students will build on a foundation of knowledge about the UNCRC already acquired though primary and secondary school. However, for the most part, this study found there was insufficient evidence of comprehensive CRE at either primary or secondary level. When reading these findings, it is important to bear in mind the relationship between babies and young children as rights-holders and the government as the ultimate legal duty-bearer under the UNCRC. Any deficits highlighted also point to some of the (many) wider systemic issues in Ireland, which are outside the scope of this chapter to

address in full, particularly where insufficient measures have been taken by the government in recognising, respecting and resourcing this vital role. Nevertheless, babies and young children have the same rights as older children, though they will, of course, be exercised differently.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown some of the ways in which one HEI and one open-ended curriculum framework in the Republic of Ireland have provided a platform for students to learn about children's rights, and some of the barriers and tensions that can arise when students have a less-than-full appreciation of the children's rights framework as it applies to babies and young children in ECEC contexts. The study presented in this chapter indicates that it can be difficult to fully understand the implications of the UNCRC for professional practice without an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates intentional teaching about, through and for children's rights. ECEC students require a firm foundation in the children's rights framework and its synergies and overlaps with ECEC theory and practice. CRE as an approach can provide such a grounding. A central principle of a rights-based approach is that activity should contribute to the development of the capacities of governments and state actors (including future educators) to meet their obligations and of rights-holders (babies and young children) to claim their rights. From an educators' perspective, this requires a systematic children's rights model for the initial education of ECEC students. While there can be no one-size-fits-all model of CRE for early childhood, at a minimum, CRE for ECEC students should be comprehensive, interdisciplinary and interactive. It should be deeply embedded and contextualised to ECEC, and foreground a view of babies and young children as rights-holders from birth. Crucial for the realisation of all of the rights of children, ECEC students need a more explicit framing as future duty-bearers under the UNCRC. Initial education programs, including those in receipt of state funding, therefore have a responsibility to ensure that their students receive sufficient education to guide them to understand and apply a child rights-based approach to the education and care of babies and young children, and to help them become better acquainted with both the potential and limitations of the UNCRC in reality. More locally negotiated, comprehensive, systematic and interdisciplinary models for embedding CRE in HEI contexts are therefore needed to provide ECEC students with sufficient information and experiences to inform their own unique child rights-based approach to the education and care of babies and young children.

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