



Child Rights, Classroom and School Management: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This paper provides a systematic review of scholarly literature concerning the enforcement of children's rights in the classroom context and school management. The literature review is based on a systematic review methodology the authors developed drawing on the methods and guidelines used in the medical sciences over the last 15 years. Forty-two articles published between 1990 and 2014 were selected and analysed. The paper presents both a descriptive analysis and a thematic analysis in order to provide the state-of-art of international literature on child rights, classroom and school management. The descriptive analysis highlights the main characteristics of the articles included, such as type of study and methods used, classification of literature based on the geographical and thematic focus, article citation frequency, and chronological development of the subject in question. The thematic analysis synthesises the main findings extracted from the literature and highlights the main trends and gaps in research.

Keywords

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – children's rights – classroom – school management – children's rights education – teacher-pupil relations – child-friendly schools – pupil voice – professional norms and school management

Introduction

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20 November 1989, is seen as a revolutionary

document because of its explicit focus on 'the best interests of the child' and its ratification by virtually all countries of the world, with the exception of the USA (Verhellen, 1993; Verhellen, 1994; Freeman, 1996; Detrick *et al.*, 1992). It should be noted that by ratifying the CRC, countries officially undertake a commitment to ensure that children are treated as the claim-holders, that they have fundamental rights as individual persons, and that it is the parents, others adults and state (educational) authorities who are the duty-bearers. This means they have an obligation to enact these rights (Freeman, 1996; Howe and Covell, 2010).

Although the CRC enjoys such global recognition along with an almost global consensus on what constitutes children's rights, there are numerous challenges that exist in implementing its principles at the ground level, namely in the schools. This school level challenge is highlighted as a particularly pressing issue in academic and policy circles, since children spend a significant portion of their time in school. Thus, schools should ideally be the sites where children learn about and practice their rights (Wyse, 2001; Howe and Covell, 2010; UNICEF, 2012). Education is of special importance in the CRC because it is both a right for every child in itself and an indispensable means of realising the other rights stated in the Convention. A systematic review of literature concerning this issue could therefore be pivotal to understand better how the school level challenge is addressed from a research point of view.

As Verhellen (1993; 1994) points out, children's education rights can be classified along three tracks. First, children have the right to (inclusive) education, which is stated in Articles 23 and 28 of the CRC. Second, children have rights within education: the right to non-discrimination (Article 2), the right to participation in educational decisions that affect them (Article 12), and the right to freedom of expression (Article 13). Third, children have rights through education which means that they have the right to know their rights and to develop respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (Articles 29, 42). This third track implies the need for children's rights education in school.

For the purposes of the present literature review, we have chosen to focus on Verhellen's (1993; 1994) second and third tracks of children's education rights because of our specific research interest in the question of how a children's rights perspective is implemented in educational venues, such as classroom relations and school management. More specifically, this study explicitly focuses on children's rights in and through education and thus aims to provide a systematic review of scholarly literature on the enforcement of children's rights in the classroom context and school management and by means of children's rights education (hereinafter *child rights, classroom and school management*).

The purpose of this literature review is to describe and analyse the main trends and outcomes of the existing research on the topic. In so doing, the aim is to compile and contribute to the existing knowledge on child rights, classroom and school management by reviewing peer-reviewed journal articles by means of a systematic review methodology we developed that draws on the methods and guidelines used in the medical sciences over the last 15 years (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003). Hence, in this paper we will present both a descriptive and a thematic analysis. The rest of the paper is organised as follows: Part two, the next section, presents the literature review methodology, depicting the procedures and stages of data collection, extraction and evaluation; part three describes the descriptive findings. Part four is a thematic analysis where a state of the art about child rights, classroom and school management is provided by analysing the contents of the selected publications. Finally, concluding remarks about the findings, limitations found during the research, and key issues for future research are presented.

Literature Review Methodology

This study was carried out as a systematic literature review and draws on a method and guidelines proposed by Tranfield *et al.* (2003). Tranfield *et al.* (2003) argue that systematic literature reviews significantly differ from traditional narrative reviews as they can be easily replicated and are based on a more transparent selection and rigorous data collection process. Narrative reviews often lack rigour, are prone to researchers' bias and do not sufficiently explain what the collection of reviewed studies is saying (Cook *et al.*, 1997). In systematic reviews the researcher is expected to specify clearly how he/she carried out the review, the type of literature (books, journal articles, book chapters, documents, etc.) reviewed, and how and where that literature was found. In this regard, the systematic review is a research methodology characterised as being a pragmatic, transparent and reproducible manner of analysing existing literature (Cook *et al.*, 1997; Cooper, 1998; Lettieri *et al.*, 2009). The literature review we conducted is informed by these insights and was hence carried out through the following five stages:

- (1) Planning the literature review process;
- (2) Searching, identifying and organising studies;
- (3) Extracting and evaluating data;
- (4) Presenting descriptive and thematic findings;

- (5) Utilising the findings to determine the current trends and gaps in the research as well as to highlight possible policy recommendations.

In this section, stages (1), (2) and (3) will be presented to give the reader an overview of how we conducted the literature review. The descriptive and thematic findings (stage 4) and the analysis of findings (stage 5) will be presented in the subsequent sections.

Stage 1 – Literature review planning

In stage 1, the emphasis is placed on literature review planning and includes the following two phases:

- (1) Forming a panel of experts (review panel) who discuss and develop the review methodology and regularly evaluate the results.
- (2) Establishing the context of the field of investigation in order to acquire the subject vocabulary, discover important variables relevant to the topic and to identify sources of data collection.

In phase 1, the review panel was established which included the faculty members of the Department of Sociology of Law, Lund University who are involved in the SIDA-funded international training programme at Lund University on Child Rights, Classroom and School Management. The review methodology that this study employs was elaborated during the regular meetings of the panel. The panel determined the context and scope of the field of investigation, relevant variables, search keywords and phrases (search vocabulary) and sources of information (e.g. *EBSCO*), and citation indexes (Sociofile, Web of Science, Google Scholar). Hence, during phase 2, the decision was made to search for and review literature specifically dealing with the question of how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is incorporated and implemented in the following three educational arenas/contexts, hereinafter the *three themes*:

- (1) Classroom context (children's rights observance in the classroom, i.e. teacher-pupil relations).
- (2) School management (children's participation rights in the management of schools).
- (3) Child human rights education in schools (the enforcement of children's rights in schools by educating both teachers and children about CRC).

Stage 2 – Searching, Identifying and Organising Studies

The specific setting up of delimitations and context in the Stage 1 provided a solid framework for Stage 2, enabling us to determine the studies that fell outside or within the scope of the topic being investigated. Stage 2 includes the following three phases:

- (1) Writing of a review protocol that provides guidelines on how a literature review should be conducted. The review protocol should enable other researchers to replicate the review.
- (2) Actual literature search process in the *EBSCO* database.
- (3) Organising the identified studies by means of *Zotero*, a reference management programme.

In phase 1 we developed a review protocol that provided details on how the literature review should be conducted by the review panel. The protocol provided information about the search keywords (search vocabulary), literature search engines and database(s) used for data collection and citation frequencies analysis, the criteria for including and excluding studies, the criteria for assessing the quality of the studies selected (see Table 1 for more details on

TABLE 1. *Review protocol for including or excluding the studies retrieved*

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Only peer-reviewed journal articles published between 1990–2014.	Books, edited volumes, book chapters, unpublished papers, theses, reports, magazine articles, peer-reviewed studies published in conference proceedings, etc.
Research published in English Research explicitly focusing on the three themes outlined in Stage 1 related to the implementation of CRC in (1) classroom context, (2) school management, and via (3) child human rights education in schools.	Research published in other languages Research related to displaced children and the conditions of children in war-torn societies, parents v. children's rights, the right of children to education, UNICEF and children's rights, CRC and national educational reforms, school dropouts/exclusions, inclusive education and disabled children, children, education and spirituality, effective pedagogy and children's learning.

inclusion/exclusion criteria). For this literature review, the *EBSCO* database was chosen as the main source for searching and identifying the relevant studies. The keywords used (search vocabulary) for the literature search stemmed from the three themes specified in Stage 1. The literature search exclusively focused on peer-reviewed articles, published in English between 1990–2014. The explicit focus on peer-reviewed articles served as one of the main quality criteria of this literature review. We decided to use Boolean search methods (AND/OR/NOT) and search within abstracts, using the following keywords: child rights, children's rights, child rights education, children's rights education, classroom, teacher, pupil voice, child-friendly school, UN Child Rights Convention, CRC, rights-based approach.

In phase 2, we conducted the actual literature search in the *EBSCO* database in accordance with the review protocol developed in phase 1. The use of the aforementioned search vocabulary in the *EBSCO* database resulted in 475 hits. In phase 3, all 475 hits were exported to the *Zotero* reference management programme for the inclusion and exclusion process that was carried out in the Stage (3).

Stage 3 – Extracting and Evaluating Data

As mentioned in stage 2, the use of search keywords in *EBSCO* resulted in 475 hits. Since this is a considerable amount of data, the data extraction, assessment and analysis were undertaken in the following four phases:

- (1) Abstract screening and classifying (thematically) the studies included in the *Zotero* programme (inclusion-exclusion process one).
- (2) Reading (skim read) the full text of the studies (inclusion-exclusion process two).
- (3) Bibliography analysis of the studies included to find new relevant references.
- (4) Citation frequencies analysis.

Phase 1 – Abstract Screening

In phase 1 the abstracts of all 475 studies were reviewed (skimmed through for relevance) by the panel. Then, based on the explicit inclusion/exclusion criteria (see the Review Protocol in Table 1), 51 of the 475 studies were included and kept for the second inclusion/exclusion phase. While skimming the abstracts, we simultaneously classified the included studies thematically (in accordance with the three themes specified in Stage 1) and each included paper was placed in the relevant folder. By classifying and placing each paper thematically in separate folders in *Zotero*, we established the basic analytical structure of the

review. Hence, *Zotero* served as the main platform for extracting, evaluating and synthesising the data in Stage 3. As Hart (1998) suggests, classification is a necessary part of the analytical stage of a literature review. Without the use of classification, large amounts of information cannot be processed in a systematic and progressive manner.

Phase 2 – Looking at the FullText of the Studies

Due to the strict inclusion/exclusion decisions made in phase 1, the number of studies finally selected was manageable. Because of this, we decided in phase 2 quickly to examine the full text of the studies included in order to do a more rigorous relevance analysis and hence preserve only the “spot on” studies for the final literature review. After the second round of inclusion/exclusion, the number of studies was narrowed down to 29. As all 29 were considered “spot on”, the full texts were downloaded from the *EBSCO* database or directly from the website of the journal for the bibliography analysis (phase 3) in order to find new and relevant references that we may not have captured in the *EBSCO* literature search.

Phase 3 – Bibliography Analysis

In phase 3, we performed a bibliography analysis in which we checked the reference lists of all the included studies to find additional relevant publications. They were identified by reading the title and then reading the abstracts and/or full text. This resulted in the identification of an additional 13 relevant studies. Thus, the final number of journal articles included in the literature review was 42.

Phase 4 – Citation Frequencies Analysis

In phase 4, our aim was to identify the studies that would introduce us to mainstream debates in the field of child rights and classroom/school management (i.e. the three themes). In accordance with the guidelines proposed by Hart (1998), we carried out a citation frequency analysis to determine which studies embody and disseminate the core ideas on the topic. We utilised citation indexes such as *Sociofile*, *Web of Science* and *Google Scholar* to gain a clear picture of which authors and studies were most frequently cited by other authors. Each study was ranked accordingly based on its citation frequency. If a study has been cited at least 50 times, it was regarded as being in the category *top cited literature*. Eleven of the 42 studies were in this citation category.

It should be noted that in this study we do not claim to provide a comprehensive review of all publications related to education and children's rights. First, we only covered peer-reviewed journal articles published in English,

possibly missing important studies published in other languages. Second, this literature review had a more narrow and specific approach, and only included publications that focused on children's rights issues in the classroom context and school management as the central problem. The studies that marginally discussed these issues or briefly mention children's rights in schools while discussing other issues were not included.

In the next sections, two separate analyses of the information will be presented: a descriptive and a thematic analysis. The descriptive analysis is useful to understand the main characteristics of the field of investigation, such as types of studies and methods used (theoretical, empirical [quantitative or qualitative], review/argumentative), chronological development of the subject in question, classification of literature based on the main geographic focus, and the thematic focus of the studies (theme classification). The thematic analysis focuses on synthesising the main outcomes extracted from the literature and its main aim is to highlight current trends and gaps in the research as well as to inform future research and practice.

Descriptive Analysis

In this section we briefly discuss the descriptive findings of the review. The descriptive analysis provides an overview of the characteristics of the studies included. Table 2 presents the basic characteristics of the 42 papers from the systematic review, classifying them according to the following criteria:

- Name of the author.
- The year of publication in the period 1990–2014.
- The country of study according to the primary geographic focus of the paper.
- The focus of the paper according to three themes: (1) classroom context, (2) school management, and (3) child human rights education in schools.
- The types of study based on the use of theory, empirical data or review/argumentative papers that report the findings from other studies.
- Top cited papers among the included studies.

A brief summary of each issue is presented below.

Columns I–III in Table 2 show the number, author and year of publication of papers that were included according to the inclusion criteria in the period 1990–2014. The timeline and evolution indicate that child rights and classroom/school management is still an understudied research area, as our systematic review identified only 42 journal articles published between 1990–2014. There

TABLE 2. Papers included for the systematic review of the literature on child rights, classroom and school management, 1990–2014

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI
#	Author	Year of Publication	Country of study/focus	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Empirical	Theory	Review or Argumentative	Top cited
1	Adams	2009	UK	x	x				x	
2	Alderson	1999	UK	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
3	Alderson	2000	UK	x	x		x			x
4	Biddulph	2011	UK	x	x		x	x		
5	Carter & Osler	2000	UK	x		x	x			
6	Clair <i>et al.</i>	2012	Turkey & Macedonia		x		x		x	
7	Covell	2010	UK		x		x			
8	Covel <i>et al.</i>	2008	UK	x	x	x	x			
9	Covel <i>et al.</i>	2010	UK			x	x			
10	Covel <i>et al.</i>	2011	UK			x	x			
11	Covell & Howe	1999	Canada		x		x			x
12	Covell & Howe	2001	Canada		x		x			x
13	Flutter	2007	UK	x			x			x
14	Gilleece & Cosgrove	2012	Ireland		x		x			x

TABLE 2. Papers included for the systematic review of the literature on child rights, classroom and school management, 1990–2014 (cont.)

33	Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt	2013	Global	x	x	x	x	x
34	Reay	2006	UK	x	x	x	x	x
35	Rudduck & Flutter	2000	UK	x	x	x	x	x
36	Shumba	2003	Zimbabwe	x	x	x	x	x
37	Smith	2007	New Zealand	x	x	x	x	x
38	Sriprakash	2010	India	x	x	x	x	x
39	Weshah <i>et al.</i>	2012	Jordan	x	x	x	x	x
40	Wickenberg & Leo	2014	India	x	x	x	x	x
41	Wickenberg <i>et al.</i>	2012	28 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America	x	x	x	x	x
42	Wyse	2001	UK	x	x	x	x	x

were only two journal articles published between 1990–1998; however, from 1999 the number of publications started to increase. The highest number of publications was in 2000 (seven papers) and after that year, the number decreases quickly, especially declining during 2002–2004.

Column IV lists the country of study/focus of the included papers according to their main geographic focus. If the paper does not focus on a specific country or countries and mostly addresses general and global problems of promoting children's rights in classroom/school management, then it is treated as a study dealing with global issues. This classification is useful better to understand how heterogeneous the geography of the included studies are. As we conducted the literature search only in English, the results are not surprising and a large portion of the studies come from English speaking countries such as the United Kingdom (19 papers), Canada (4 papers) and Ireland (2 papers), and partly from European Union countries and Eastern Europe (Italy, Sweden, Lithuania, Germany, Russia, Turkey, Macedonia, 6 papers). Less research comes from Asia (India, Jordan) and Africa (Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Rwanda) in spite of the tremendous attention that international organisations (UNICEF) and development agencies (e.g. Swedish International Development Agency) pay to children's rights and school management issues in these regions. Six are of a more general nature and they basically address the implementation of CRC in a global perspective. Surprisingly, no research comes from Latin American countries, with the exception of one paper by Wickenberg *et al.* (2012) where they mention Colombia whilst discussing the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in a global perspective. For obvious reasons, there was no literature from the United States, since the country did not ratify the Convention.

Columns V–VII show the classification of papers according to the theme/content. The classification is based on three interlinked themes that address how the CRC is incorporated and implemented in: (1) the classroom context, (2) school management, and via (3) child human rights education in schools. It should be noted that these three themes are closely interlinked and thus overlapping is inevitable; a considerable number of papers may fall within the scope of two or all three themes (e.g. see Table 2). As findings indicate, 23 papers deal with the issues raised in Theme 1, for example, exploring the hierarchical relations between teacher and pupils and how children's rights perspective could transform such unequal power relations. Twenty-eight of the included studies address the question of how children's right to participate are observed in the management of schools, while 19 studies see child human rights education as an important pathway to promoting children's rights in classroom relations and school management.

In columns VIII–X, we also classified the papers according to type of study: those based on empirical data, the use of theory, or that were review/argumentative papers reporting findings from other studies and research projects. One important finding of the descriptive analysis is that the level of empirical data used in the research field is very high, whereas the level of theorising is very low and no particular theory dominates. The findings clarify that a large proportion of papers (30 articles) are empirical studies or reports on research projects that utilise empirical data, while only 6 of the 42 papers utilised some kind of theoretical framework to analyse the empirical data. The following theories are utilised in the reviewed studies: child development and the social construction of childhood (Alderson, 1999), Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (Gilleece and Cosgrove, 2012), the sociology of childhood (Quennerstedt and Quennerstedt, 2013; Harcourt and Mazzoni, 2012; Smith, 2007), John Dewey's educational theory (Quennerstedt and Quennerstedt 2013), Arnot and Reay's notion of pedagogic voice (Biddulph, 2011), Bourdieu's conceptual tools of field and cultural capital (Reay, 2006), and sociocultural theory (Smith, 2007). Regarding the types of empirical data used, the survey (quantitative) is the most widely employed data collection method in research on children's rights, which frequently involves the collaboration and participation of academic researchers, school teachers, principals and pupils (e.g. Covell, Howe and McNeil 2010; Alderson, 1999; Howe and Covell, 2000). The use of qualitative data is not very common in this field as only a few studies are based on ethnographic methods (e.g. Harcourt and Mazzoni, 2012; Wyse, 2001) or utilise qualitative data such as document reviews, individual and group interviews, and focus group discussions (e.g. Clair *et al.*, 2012). One-third (15 papers) of the studies were classified as review/argumentative papers because they were not entirely based on empirical data, but appeared to be discussion papers or presented arguments from other empirical studies.

Column XI in Table 2 presents the results of the citation frequencies analysis conducted during the data extraction and evaluation process. According to the criteria set in stage 3, phase 4 of section 2 (Literature Review Methodology), 11 of the 42 studies were determined to be top cited papers. The key issues discussed in these 11 studies are presented in the following thematic analysis section.

Thematic Analysis

The following three themes were identified as the main fields of investigation in this systematic review: (1) children's rights observance in the classroom

context and teacher-pupil relations; (2) children's participation in the management of schools and their everyday experiences in schools; and (3) child human rights education in schools and its impact on classroom (teacher-pupils) relations and the school administration. Although these three themes are presented separately in this section, it should be noted that they are all interlinked and hence, some papers have been categorised under two or all three themes.

Theme 1: Children's Rights in the Classroom Setting

Teacher-pupil Relations, Children's Participation in the Classroom and the Voice of the Pupils

The question of how children's rights are observed in the classroom setting was examined in 23 of the studies (see Table 2, column v). One argument common to this entire body of literature is that the relations between teacher and pupils in the classroom setting are very hierarchical and unequal, where adults have the right to make decisions and administer discipline and children are viewed as dependent, inexperienced, undisciplined and in need of clear order and authoritative guidance. The prevalence of such an authoritarian style of teacher-pupil relations in the classroom does not conform to the children's participation rights enshrined in Articles 12, 13, and 29 of the CRC. Accordingly, the bulk of the studies suggest that classroom management should be based on democratic principles where children's participation is encouraged, where there is freedom of expression for pupils and teachers, and where children have opportunities to be involved in the processes pertaining to teaching and learning.

Another important issue highlighted in the reviewed publications was the role that the children's rights perspective, namely the CRC principles, play in reshaping the relationship between teacher and pupils (Carter and Osler, 2000; Johnny, 2005; Lebedev *et al.*, 2002; Osler and Starkey, 1998; Quennerstedt and Quennerstedt, 2013; Quennerstedt, 2011; Wickenberg and Leo, 2014; Wickenberg *et al.*, 2012; Sriprakash, 2010). These studies emphasise the importance of human rights education of children as an effective way to counter the hierarchical teaching strategies in schools and establish more egalitarian and democratic relations between teacher and pupils. Although teachers often assume that they have traditional authority in the classroom by virtue of their position and that pupils should accept that authority without a challenge, there is empirical evidence that this is not always the case because pupils who are aware of their rights visibly resist this form of traditional authority (e.g. Lodge and Lynch, 2000; Carter and Osler, 2000). Hence, if both teachers and pupils learn about the importance of human rights in general and of children's human

rights in particular, both parties would have a good understanding of their rights and responsibilities, which would in turn promote democratic interactions and a human rights culture in the classroom (*ibid.*).

On the other hand, some studies found that there is a strong resistance among teachers to accept fully children as rights holders in many schools (Johnny, 2005; Osler and Starkey, 1998; Carter and Osler, 2000; Covell and Howe, 1999; Harcourt and Mazzoni, 2012; Lodge and Lynch, 2000; Quennerstedt and Quennerstedt, 2013; Quennerstedt 2011). This resistance stems from the predominant school culture and teachers' traditional concerns that children's knowledge of their rights may weaken the teacher's authority in the classroom. As Carter and Osler (2000) note, being a "soft" teacher (i.e. 'someone who isn't too strict, does not talk all the time and understands you and your limits') is perceived by teachers as being weak, tokenistic or undervalued by their colleagues, whereas being a "hard" teacher is equated with self-confidence, more prestige and teachers feeling that they control the class. Likewise, teachers frequently opt for hierarchical teaching techniques in which the teacher exercises the power to shape the overall classroom environment. In this regard, traditional teaching practices are in conflict with children's participation rights. Given such predominant cultural values, norms and traditional teaching strategies, attempts to promote children's rights in the classroom context and school management become a daunting task. Thus, one important conclusion from the reviewed publications is that there is a need to change the school culture, professional norms and teachers' perceptions of proper teacher-pupil relations if we are to promote children's rights in classroom and school management.

In the publications, the role of pupil voice strategies is considered to be a significant means for creating more egalitarian relations between teacher and pupils. The importance of the child's voice is enshrined in article 12 of the CRC, which states that the views of the child should be given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity. There are different ways and means to promote pupil voice in schools, for example, via pupil consultations and representation (Reay, 2006), by involving pupils in the formulation of the school curriculum (Biddulph, 2011), engaging them in action research projects concerning children's rights (Leitch *et al.*, 2007), or by introducing particular and more inclusive pedagogical practices (Osler, 2000).

Fourteen of the publications emphasise that there is a close correlation between the children/pupil voice and the promotion of a democratic environment and effective teaching and learning in the classroom (Adams, 2009; Flutter, 2007; Rudduck and Flutter, 2000; Biddulph, 2011; Gilleece and Cosgrove,

2012; Harcourt and Mazzoni, 2012; Leitch *et al.*, 2007; Lodge and Lynch, 2000; Lundy, 2007; McIntyre *et al.*, 2005; Osler, 2000; Reay, 2006; Quennerstedt and Quennerstedt, 2013; Quennerstedt, 2011). The greater number of these authors claim that children take an active part in their own learning and are more prone to collaborative learning with their peers when they are treated with respect and when their voice is taken seriously in the formation of classroom rules. For instance, one study conducted in Italy asserts that there is a need to consider children's notions of social justice and their standpoints if we are to obtain the correct definition of what the ideal classroom looks like: respectful relationships between the teachers and children, teachers being kind and not shouting at the children, and a just and fair approach by different teachers when responding to the inappropriate behaviours of individual children (Harcourt and Mazzoni, 2012). Flutter (2007), drawing on evidence from his research conducted in the UK, also shows that pupil voice strategies enable teachers to acquire a greater understanding of the teaching and learning processes and help them to change the way they think about pupils and learning. The evidence suggests that teachers who are more sensitive to pupil voice and needs would encounter considerable support from their pupils (Osler, 2000). Hence, the relationships that reflect mutual trust and respect between teachers and pupils is a pre-condition for effective education in schools (McIntyre *et al.*, 2005). However, as research shows, in real life situations, this is not the case as many teachers remain reluctant to pupil voice approaches because they believe that giving more power to pupils would undermine their authoritative position and legitimacy in the classroom (Flutter, 2007).

Theme 2: Children's rights in school management

Children's Participation in the Everyday Life and Management of Schools, and Child-Friendly and Rights-Respecting Schools

Twenty-eight of the publications address the question of how children's rights to participation are observed in the management of schools (see Table 2, column VI). Whilst all these 28 studies highlighted the importance of considering children's rights in school management, for the sake of clarity we decided to categorise the publications into the following three sub-themes:

- (1) Children's everyday school experiences and participation in school management.
- (2) Children's formal participation in the management of schools through school councils.
- (3) Child-friendly and rights-respecting schools.

Despite the international recognition of the CRC, there are still numerous challenges that exist in implementing child rights principles in schools where children spend a significant portion of their time. This challenge is primarily connected to enforcing children's participatory rights in the management affairs of schools. The problems of children's participation in school management are highlighted in 14 of the publications (Covell *et al.*, 2008; Alderson, 1999; Alderson, 2000; Johnny, 2005; Jiang *et al.*, 2014; Howe and Covell, 2000; Harcourt and Mazzoni, 2012; Jonyniene and Samuelsson, 1999; Osler and Starkey, 1998; Rudduck and Flutter, 2000; Smith, 2007; Wickenberg and Leo, 2014; Wickenberg *et al.*, 2012; Wyse, 2001). One perspective commonly raised in these publications is that children's active involvement in the management affairs of schools would enable them to learn about and practise democratic choice and responsibility and thus come to understand themselves as democratic citizens. In other words, they would begin to perceive themselves as moral persons with rights and responsibilities who are capable of shaping policies and making choices that positively affect others (Johnny, 2005). However, the concept of children's participation rights may be somehow threatening to school managers in the sense that children, if made aware of their rights and given room to freely express their views, may challenge the school's hierarchical administrative culture and injustices that adults have not questioned or recognised (e.g. Osler and Starkey, 1998; Johnny, 2005). Thus, one important suggestion raised in many of the studies is the need to transform the perceptions of school managers and to create a human rights culture and professional norms in schools by establishing democratic structures such as school councils.

Eleven publications emphasise the role of student councils and the school inspection process as formal, democratic structures that provide venues for children to engage actively in the management of schools and express and enact their views and concerns (Covell *et al.*, 2008; Alderson, 1999; Alderson, 2000; Osler, 2000; Johnny, 2005; Howe and Covell, 2000; Rudduck and Flutter, 2000; Flutter, 2007; Wyse, 2001; Quennerstedt and Quennerstedt, 2013; Quennerstedt, 2011). Much of this literature argues that school councils could serve as a means to look at school management from the children's perspective. The school leadership would then be able to rethink their managerial methods by tuning to the children's experiences and views. Nevertheless, the publications show that the existence of school councils does not automatically mean that the participation of children is respected. For instance, Wyse (2001) in his study of children's participation in primary and secondary schools in the UK, showed that children's opportunities to express their views were extremely limited even when school councils were in place. Wyse thus concluded

that the aim of promoting children's rights to participation in schools remains elusive unless educational practice changes to a focus on school processes rather than products (*ibid.*). This example brings us to the question of the varying views of school management, teachers and pupils about school councils. The survey conducted in schools in Great Britain and Northern Ireland indicates that the views of teachers and of pupils about the role and usefulness of school councils differ considerably (Alderson, 1999; Alderson, 2000). Teachers regarded school councils merely as a formality – an unnecessary extra burden for an already over-stressed staff and a danger that needs to be avoided, whereas children stated that school councils could be an effective tool for promoting pupil voice and participation in the school management (*ibid.*).

Five of the publications deal with the subject of *Child-Friendly Schools* – UNICEF's child rights-based approach to education that aims to mainstream the CRC principles into classroom relations and school management practices (Clair *et al.*, 2012; Orkodashvili, 2013; Weshah *et al.* 2012; Wickenberg and Leo, 2014; Wickenberg *et al.*, 2012). These studies argue that the idea of child-friendly and rights-respecting schools is a promising approach for promoting respectful relationships and collaboration between teacher and pupils and creating a democratic climate in the management of schools. Hence, when children are respected as citizens and taught about their rights and responsibilities, they feel more empowered to act, demonstrate meaningful participation in school affairs and display morally and socially responsible behaviours that define active citizenship.

In the remaining four publications the emphasis is placed on the *Rights-Respecting Schools* initiative, a rights-based whole school reform implemented in Hampshire, UK (Covell *et al.*, 2008; Covell *et al.*, 2010; Covell *et al.*, 2011; Covell, 2010). These studies suggest that rights-respecting schools, at least at the elementary level, may increase pupil participation in the management of schools. For instance, compared with their peers in the other two schools, pupils who attended rights-respecting schools demonstrated considerably higher levels of school participation, fewer social problems, greater optimism and higher self-concepts (Covell *et al.*, 2011). However, the reactions of teachers and education administrators in relation to the rights-respecting schools initiative was not positive as they have expressed fears that rights-based schooling would undermine teacher authority if not lead to anarchistic classrooms and unruly children. The results of these studies indicate that there is a need to reshape recalcitrant school cultures, hierarchical traditions and teacher perceptions if we are to mainstream CRC principles into the management of schools.

Theme 3: Promoting Children's Rights in Educational Institutions through Child Rights (CRC) Education

Teaching Children's Rights in an Undemocratic Climate

In 19 of the publications, children's rights education is emphasised as a transformative tool that promotes constructive and democratic relations in the classroom as well as increases children's engagement in the management of schools (see Table 2, column VII). One claim commonly made in these publications is that educating children about their rights potentially enhances their understanding and support for rights and responsibilities, promotes their sense of active citizenship, transforms schools into human rights communities, and creates a more positive school ethos for learning, mutual respect, tolerance and good social relations. By children's rights education, the reviewed publications referred to education and educational practices that are in harmony with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is a form of education that treats children as rights-holders and citizens, thereby viewing schools as democratic communities where children actively participate in the management and everyday life of schools and acquire the values and practice of citizenship (see e.g. Howe and Covell, 2010; Covell and Howe, 2001; Covell and Howe, 1999; Johnny, 2005; Krappmann, 2006).

While all the 19 publications deal with the aforesaid issues, our findings indicate that these publications advance the following two main debates or sub-themes that are interlinked but need to be presented separately for the sake of clarity:

- (1) Teaching children's rights in undemocratic schools. Teachers' reluctance to teach and recognise children's rights.
- (2) Children's rights education as a means to promote constructive classroom relationship.

In seven publications, anti-democratic trends in schools and hierarchical pedagogic traditions are pointed out as significant barriers to the realisation of children's rights education in schools (Alderson, 1999; Carter and Osler, 2000; Howe and Covell, 2010; Krappmann, 2006; Lundy, 2007; Rudduck and Flutter, 2000; Osler and Starkey, 1998). These studies assert that the efforts to introduce children's rights education in schools are significantly undermined by the prevailing anti-democratic trends in schools. There are numerous factors that account for such anti-democratic environment in schools:

- Inadequate knowledge of the school leadership and teachers of the advantages of introducing children's rights education (Covell *et al.*, 2010).

- Adults' traditional beliefs that children's immaturity precludes their ability to appropriately exercise their rights (Lundy, 2007).
- Teachers' fear of loss of authority in the classroom (Alderson, 1999).
- Teachers' perception that it is inappropriate to politicise children by teaching them that they are citizens with rights (Howe and Covell, 2010).
- Teachers are often poorly prepared/trained to teach in non-traditional ways; they lack the confidence to effect participatory activities such as cooperative learning, social issues, role play (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000).
- Teachers are not prepared in their university training to listen fully and take in the voices of children (Lundy, 2007).

One important suggestion from the aforesaid studies is that the negative attitudes of teachers and school managers towards children's rights education may change if they receive adequate training on children's rights and CRC and acquire a good understanding of the educational and social benefits of rights education.

In 14 publications, children's rights education is highlighted as a means for improving classroom atmosphere and promoting children's participation in the management of schools (Covell *et al.*, 2011; Carter and Osler, 2000; Covell *et al.*, 2010; Covell and Howe, 1999; Covell and Howe, 2001; Howe and Covell, 2010; Kairiené and Dzindzalietiené, 2009; Osler, 1994; Shumba, 2003; Wickenberg and Leo, 2014; Wickenberg *et al.*, 2012; Quennerstedt, 2011; Quennerstedt and Quennerstedt, 2013; Covell *et al.*, 2008). The greater part of these studies suggests that children who are educated about their rights and responsibilities are more prone and motivated to be engaged in the everyday life of schools and thus more likely to do better at school. This greater engagement possibly results from the children's sense of being empowered and having the right to participate. As a result, they start to perceive school as a positive, welcoming place. The relevant empirical example in this context is a Canadian study that investigated the impact of children's rights education on classroom and school atmosphere (Covell and Howe, 2001; Covell and Howe, 1999). Children who received training on child human rights were more tolerant of ethnic differences, had a broader and more accurate understanding of their rights and responsibilities in the classroom, understood and valued their rights to equality, education, healthcare, and protection from abuse. In contrast, children who did not receive the training either indicated that they did not understand what it meant for children to have rights, or they understood rights in terms of freedoms and wants (*ibid.*). Thus, children's rights education, if implemented in a way consistent with the CRC principles, has the potential to promote a constructive and democratic climate in the classroom and school management.

Top Cited Publications: Core Ideas and Issues

In this section our aim is not to repeat what has already been said and presented in previous sections, rather we would like to provide a brief overview of the mainstream debates and key issues raised in the 11 top-cited papers (see Table 2, column XI for a full list). The rationale for focusing on these 11 top-cited papers is that citation analysis is a useful tool to determine which studies embody and disseminate the core ideas and issues on the topic. Hence, the following key issues have been highlighted in the top cited publications:

- School councils as a key practical tool for promoting children's rights in schools (Alderson, 1999; Alderson, 2000; Smith, 2007).
- Anti-democratic climate and trends in schools: hierarchical relations between teachers and pupils, and school principals, teachers and parents' resistance to implement children's rights education in schools (Alderson, 1999; Alderson, 2000; Covell and Howe, 1999).
- The positive impact of a rights-based education on children's learning processes, classroom climate and children's engagement in school affairs (Covell and Howe, 2001; Covell and Howe, 1999).
- The need to introduce pupil voice approaches, such as pupil consultation, pupil participation and opportunities to express freely their views, into classroom and school management to promote democratic and rights-respecting climate in schools (Flutter, 2007; Lundy, 2007; McIntyre *et al.*, 2005; Osler, 2000; Reay, 2006; Wyse, 2001).

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

The aim of this systematic literature review was to describe and investigate the main trends and outcomes of the scholarly literature on the enforcement of children's rights in the classroom context and school management. In doing so, we aimed to compile and contribute to the existing knowledge on child rights, classroom and school management. Drawing on literature review methods and guidelines widely used in medical sciences, we identified and reviewed 42 peer-reviewed journal articles, which dealt with the question of how the children's rights perspective (CRC principles) is implemented in educational institutions/schools. More specifically, the emphasis was placed on the following three themes: (a) children's rights in the classroom context, (b) children's participation in school management, (c) children's rights education in schools.

The systematic review of the literature has displayed the mainstream debates and the gaps in the knowledge on child rights, classroom and school management. In particular, the combination of descriptive and thematic analysis served to determine the state-of-the-art and suggest implications for both academic and policy communities who work in the field of children's rights and classroom/school management. The following three main conclusions can be drawn from the descriptive analysis:

First, the systematic review identified only 42 journal articles published between 1990 and 2014. This means that the issue of child rights and classroom and school management continues to remain an understudied research area. In this sense our research could be said to support the findings of a previous literature review (Quennerstedt, 2011) highlighting the need for more research in this field. However, our study differs from Quennerstedt's in several ways. First, we focused only on journal articles as quality criteria and did not include book chapters and books in our review. Second, the scope of the literature review was explicitly limited to three themes and we consciously excluded the literature that dealt with other issues (e.g. inclusive education). Third, our review combined descriptive and thematic analyses of the reviewed publications, an approach that provides a more comprehensive picture of child rights, classroom and school management issues.

Second, a large portion of the reviewed publications is from Europe (mainly the UK) and Canada, whilst there has been little scholarly investigation of child rights and classroom/school management issues in the context of African and Asian countries. We could not find a single English-language publication that dealt with Latin America. However, we recognise the limitations of our literature review methodology. Given that our review focused only on journal articles published in English, we probably missed most of the non-English publications, relevant books and research reports and that the authors may have chosen to disseminate the results of their investigations in monographs and research reports or for a national audience instead of an international one. In this regard, the results of our systematic review can be considered valid only in relation to journal articles published in English in the period 1990–2014.

Third, the level of theory use in the reviewed publications is very low. Only 6 of the 42 studies utilised some kind of theory to analyse the empirical data. This situation is somewhat surprising given the high level of empirical research in this field. One possible explanation is that the scholarly research in this field is more oriented to the needs and concerns of policy-making structures rather than the academic community. Hence, there is a need to increase the level of theorising in the field. As for the types of empirical data used in the studies,

quantitative methods (survey) are prevalent; only a few publications utilised qualitative methods.

The analysis of the three themes (thematic analysis) shows that countries have made little progress in mainstreaming the children's rights perspective (CRC principles) into classroom relations and school management, even though the CRC has been lauded as a revolutionary document because of its direct focus on the "best interests of the child" and its unprecedented ratification. One issue commonly raised in most of the studies was that the schools and educational practices are largely influenced by the social norms and hierarchical power structures that view children as passive and immature actors who are not capable of making adequate decisions. Hence, everyday classroom interactions between pupils and teachers are guided by these hierarchical normative patterns, which can explain why innumerable initiatives to promote children's rights in schools continue to remain ineffective. One important message from the thematic analysis is that there is a need to change the school culture, teachers' perceptions and social norms if we are to enforce child rights in schools. This may not be surprising or unexpected; however, one very important insight from the reviewed publications is that they all emphasise the importance of changing the school culture and social norms as a panacea for promoting children's rights in the classroom context and school management.

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