Integrating a Rights-Based Approach in Ontario Elementary Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

On May 28th 1990, Canada signed the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and ratified it the following year on December 13th, 1991. Nevertheless, to date the Convention is not explicitly included in any Canadian public, elementary school curriculum. The purpose of the research paper was to interview a small sample of elementary teachers who do teach the Convention and apply a rights-based approach in their elementary classrooms. These participants revealed how they created meaningful opportunities for their young learners to understand the Convention and ways they encouraged students to practice their social responsibility in their daily lives. Furthermore, these participants provided detailed ways to approach and integrate the Convention into the Ontario elementary school curriculum. These findings will help provide implications to the applicability of rights-based approaches in Ontario elementary classrooms.

Keywords: Rights-based approach, Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), United Nations, United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), elementary schools
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Integrating a Rights-Based Approach in Ontario Elementary Classrooms

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction to the Research Study

On November 20th, 2014, the United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. This treaty was created and enacted to affirm children’s rights in order to protect their development, survival and well-being. The United Nations (UN) recognized that children had to be addressed specifically in their own treaty. Validated by educational and developmental research, it has been found that childhood contains many sensitive periods where various experiences may impact development and learning. In order to provide children with the best possible life, children have the right to grow up in an environment that allows them to thrive and develop (Papalia, Olds, Feldman, and Kruk, 2008). During childhood, children begin to learn about themselves and how they are connected to the world. Historically, there has never been a human rights treaty ratified by 192 countries, especially targeting the protection of children (UNICEF, 2016). This Convention is extremely important as these forty-two rights have been signed and ratified by all countries of the world, excluding the United States of America and Somalia. The forty-two articles validate a child’s right to a life of learning, development and protection. Most importantly, all articles are intended to ensure each child will be able to freely participate in decisions affecting their life, and to ensure that their voice is accounted for. Although most countries in the world have signed the CRC, there are societal, political and cultural barriers that affect the delivery and guarantee of children’s rights.

On May 28th, 1990, Canada signed the Convention and ratified it the following year on December 13th, 1991. By signing and ratifying the Convention, Canada promised to make children’s rights known through legislation and advocacy. However, the Government of Canada
has yet to enact an action plan or proposed budget to promote Children’s Rights. Furthermore, in Ontario elementary schools, learning about Children’s Rights is not an official curriculum expectation. Unfortunately, these minimal movements are despicable compared to the legislations, policies and curriculum created by other countries (UNICEF Canada, 2010). Jerome, Emerson, Lundy and Orr (2015) found that many European countries like Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland have reformed their elementary curriculum to make Children’s Rights a national expectation. Furthermore, most of the said countries have monitoring systems in place to ensure the quality of delivery of Children’s Rights Education and/or have their teachers trained to teach the CRC. Everyday Canadian children are exposed to great vulnerability in their lives; the failure to address these situations creates a barrier for their learning, development and potential. Permitting children to grow up in poverty increases their dependency to rely on government and social assistance, the use of social protection and dependency on health and hospital services (UNICEF Canada, 2012).

In the 2014 annual report, UNICEF explained how children are often faced with life’s unexceptional obstacles. As the global economy moves forwards and upwards, children are often excluded from the distribution of wealth, resources and economy. Consequently, this impacts the chances children have to break the cycle of inequality and escape from toxic living environments (UNICEF, 2014). The UN’s second millennium goal is to ensure access to universal primary education for boys and girls alike, worldwide. Universal primary education is essential to eradicate poverty and promote economic prosperity, as children have access to education that will provide them with multiple life opportunities and the knowledge to determine their human fulfillment. Their basic education and learning allows them to fully develop the essential skills and strategies to become successful in the future (United Nations, 2015; UNESCO, 2015).
1.1 Research Context and Problem

In 2004, the Government of Canada publicly announced their dedication to the CRC in a document called “A Canada Fit for Children.” The document detailed how Canada will use the CRC to implement strategies and achieve goals to make Canada fit for all children. Although the document reported how the entire nation is expected to learn and promote the CRC, the plan of action has yet been implemented (United Nations Committee, 2012). The United Nations Committee has exposed that Canada has made no visible or public efforts to fulfill any of their goals in the last 10 years. There is no record of any budget or allocation of resources to invest in advocacy, awareness or training to teach children’s rights. Poor child development is affected by the government’s decision to enact policy and allocate federal funds elsewhere (UNICEF Canada, 2012). Canada ranked 24 out of the 35 audited industrialized countries for relative child poverty. In UNICEF Canada’s report it is estimated that more than 700,000 Canadian children are living in poverty. The effects of living in relative poverty affect children’s development, contribute to poorer health and lower school achievement, may increase the likelihood of welfare dependency, and impact a child’s overall well-being. Such socially and physically toxic environments prevent children from living a full life (UNICEF Canada, 2010).

Even though Article 28 of the CRC entails the right to education, UNICEF estimated in 2008 that there were approximately 93 million children in the world not enrolled in primary school education. The number rises each year as many children drop out or cannot afford the tuition for schooling (Mapp, 2011). In Canada, every child should be enrolled and attending school by Grade 1. Each province is responsible for creating curriculum documents to support their learning and development. In 2013, the Ontario Ministry of Education revised the Social Studies curriculum and expectations to make the content more sensitive to the needs of the global community. The biggest addition to the revised document was the inclusion of a citizenship
education framework. These four big ideas (active participation, identity, attributes and structures) are what guide the expectations for each grade. Nevertheless, it is not until Grade 5 in which students in Ontario are expected to: “describe the major rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship in Canada” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, pg. 114). Ontario teachers are intended to deliver the Social Studies curriculum through inquiry and discussion. Since the CRC is not explicitly mentioned in the curriculum, it is up to the discretion and competence of classroom teachers if they choose to teach about children’s rights in their classrooms. Cassidy, Brunner and Webster (2014) found that most elementary teachers noted their competency and understanding of the CRC as their barrier to implement the CRC in their classrooms. In Ontario, a vast majority of initial teacher education institutions do not have an explicit focus on Children’s Rights. If beginning teachers are not educated about the CRC, they are most likely not going to teach their students about it. In sum, if we want to see meaningful implementation of Canada’s commitments to affirming children’s rights, then it is vital that we create more explicit space for this topic in curriculum development and initial teacher education programs.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how elementary teachers are implementing rights-based approaches in their classrooms and identifying where in the curriculum they are finding space to teach about the CRC. Due to the lack of research on Ontario elementary teachers implementing rights-based approaches in their classrooms (Howe and Covell, 1999; Mundy, Manion, Masmann, and Haggerty, 2007), the findings of this study strive to shed light on how two elementary teachers are approaching Children’s Rights in their classrooms, to identify their assessment strategies, and to learn about the barriers they have
encountered when implementing rights-based practices. Human rights and citizenship rights are incredibly vague and are often interpreted as things to “look forward” to in the future. Children are living here and now; they need to realize their lives are protected by the CRC. The purpose of this research study was to learn how teachers are creating opportunities for students to learn about the CRC and to discuss the implications for curriculum developers, faculties of education and elementary teachers in order to provide opportunities for students to learn and practice the CRC.

1.3 Research Questions:

The primary research question that guided this research study was:

1) How is a sample of elementary teachers creating opportunities for their students to learn about children’s rights? What kinds of practices, approaches and types of assessment do they use to measure learning?

It will also be important to consider these subsidiary research questions:

1) How did these teachers become interested in teaching children’s rights? How did they prepare themselves to teach children’s rights?

2) Why do they believe it is important for their students learn about their rights?

3) How do these teachers fit the topic of children’s rights within their social studies curriculum framework?

4) What are the benefits of using a rights-based approach in the primary classroom? What are the reactions and responses do the students have when they learn about their rights?
1.4 Background of the Researcher

This research topic was ignited for me when I took an introductory course on Children’s Rights in my undergraduate degree. As a recent Early Childhood Studies graduate I have learned that children’s rights are frequently ignored by teachers, educators and even university professors. The courses, *Children’s Rights* and *Childhood in a Global Context*, were electives that I took the initiative to enroll in. These courses are chosen by interested students and not mandated by the teacher education programs. Now having also completed a teacher education program, it astounds me that teachers are prepared to view themselves as children’s partner in learning, yet the school system is still set up in such a way as to have children regard educators as the sole authority over their learning. Educators typically plan how the day will pan out, while keeping the children’s interests in mind. Rarely are children invited to structure their day and provide input in what they want to learn. If it was not for my volunteer trip to Cape Town, South Africa, I would have never been able to fathom what life is like when your rights are violated on a consistent basis. It took this extreme case for me to realize that I was privileged to grow up as a child, without knowing my rights, and still turn out okay. The children I worked with lived in neighborhoods notorious for gang affiliation, substance abuse and unfit, living conditions. Children came to school to escape the realities of their socially and physically toxic living environments, but I knew that they would soon be part of the cycle that has burdened their families for years. In this particular township, it is nearly impossible for a child to escape the cycle when most of the children drop out of school due to various violations of their rights. It angers me that in both societies, South Africa and Canada, there is negligence in teaching students about their rights as children. Much opposition to children’s rights is due to the fear that children will learn to overthrow their authority figures, become defiant and threaten to leave their homes. But the reality of it is that children who are not educated about their rights will be unable
to connect to their human and citizenship rights when they grow older. They may learn instead to be complacent, disinterested and become indifferent to the issues the world faces. In order to cultivate a desire to be part of the global community, children have to realize their rights from a young age and begin to participate.

1.5 Overview

My research paper will entail the following chapters. In Chapter 2 I review the literature which details the omission of children’s rights in the Ontario elementary curriculum, the attitudes and beliefs elementary teachers hold in respects to teaching children’s rights and the addressing misconceptions of children as rights-bearers. In Chapter 3 I review the research methodology and procedure used in this study including information about the sample participants and data collection instruments. In Chapter 4 I report the research findings and discuss the implications in light of the literature. Chapter 5 speaks to the implications of this study, recommendations for the future, areas of further research and final concluding thoughts. References and a list of appendixes follow at the end.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Although the CRC was created twenty-six years ago, there is minimal research done on the integration of the CRC, rights-based approach and/or children’s rights education frameworks in elementary classrooms. Specifically in Canada, the government’s lack of consideration and commitment ultimately affects how the CRC is neglected in the education system. Without the push from legislation and policy, curriculum creators, teachers and educators veer from teaching children the CRC. Ultimately, children are affected the most from this deficit because they are not given the resources or opportunities to realize and practice their rights.

In this chapter, I review the literature surrounding the implementation of the CRC in primary classrooms. First, I specifically highlight the pedagogical approaches, citizenship frameworks and curriculum expectations used to promote human rights and children’s rights in the classroom. I also provide definitions and explain on why there is a separation between human rights and children’s rights in the classroom. Next, I indicate the barriers teachers and educators may encounter when teaching children’s rights to their students. Research has indicated that the barriers could lie within themselves like their competency to teach the CRC or these barriers could be external forces working against them. Finally, I review the trials and triumphs of implementing a rights-based approach in elementary classrooms. Research on the successful and effective implementation of a rights-based approach demonstrates why it is important that children know, understand and practice their rights in order to be proactive, sensitive and responsive global citizens. Their participation in their world does not start when they come of age; it starts when they first realize how they fit in the world.

2.1 Citizenship Education and Curriculum Content
Children formally learn about the political systems and structures of their nation in school. There are many educational frameworks in which citizenship can be delivered through. The most frequently used approach is the citizenship education framework. It is most commonly integrated within the Social Studies curriculum. Citizenship education can be subdivided as three entities: citizenship values, citizenship behaviors and citizenship knowledge. Most teachers will teach the three entities in separate and discrete lessons. This in turn implicitly establishes the discourse of citizenship education being reserved for Social Studies lessons (Howe & Covell, 2005). One of the outcomes of reforming the Ontario Social Studies and History curriculum was to integrate the citizenship education framework. Most Ontario students would be exposed to this framework if their teachers were using the newer edition of the curriculum.

2.1.1 The Focus on Human Rights Education

Many elementary schools use a variety of citizenship education frameworks (Howe and Covell, 2005) and these typically invoke the notion of rights. In their research, Cassidy et al. (2014) found that teachers more commonly enact Human Rights Education (HRE) than they do Children’s Rights Education. They also found that teachers who enacted human rights education had the opportunity to learn about it in their teacher education program. They were able to integrate HRE into their classroom pedagogy and instruction, in other words, because they were explicitly taught how to do so. Although these teachers established a HRE framework in their classrooms, Howe and Covell (2005) characterized HRE as a framework that assists in the delivery of only citizenship knowledge. HRE tends to limit the focus to the violations and situations adults are subjected to. Moreover, it reinforces how children can be active citizens when they grow up, thereby presuming they do not have citizenship rights as children. Howe and Covell (2005) have characterized Children’s Rights Education as the only citizenship education
framework to encompass all three entities: citizenship values, behavior and knowledge. Their research found that when children are exposed to children’s rights education, they are able to focus on the situations and violations that occurred in their childhood and relate to their prior experiences. Each article in the CRC is written in simple language so children can understand it and link their experiences to the examples given. The articles are written to be age and developmentally appropriate for children to understand and for their teachers to use in the classroom. In order for children to comprehend the CRC, they must be able to relate the rights to their everyday lives. The lack of consideration for children’s rights education and the CRC may be caused by the UN’s disproportionate emphasis on HRE.

2.1.2 Research on HRE

On December 23rd, 1994, the UN declared that the next decade would be dedicated to educate the world on HRE. In 2005, the UN assigned the first phase of action to educate elementary and secondary students on HRE. This framework should have been apparent through policies, learning environments, and coursework and professional development of elementary and secondary teachers. Embedded within this phase is the acceptance of the CRC but it is not explicitly taught in the guidelines presented (OHCHR, 2005). Although the decade was dedicated to HRE, it was difficult to track the progression and success because HRE was not consistently implemented. In 2008, Stellmacher and Sommers concluded there was minimal research conducted on the implementation of HRE in elementary schools. Despite the different learning goals and framework, HRE was interchangeably substituted for a different citizenship education framework like global citizenship education, civic education or peace education. This made it difficult to track the progression of HRE and implementation of this framework in primary and/or secondary schools. Additionally, Rapoport (2012) found that HRE was hardly mentioned in the
primary school curriculum. When he did find HRE in the curriculum documents, it was often linked to the expectations for national citizenship rights. Mundy, et al. (2007) found that Canadian students were taught global education through the HRE framework. They also concluded that many students were taught through the way their teachers viewed Children’s Rights. They weren’t given the opportunities to inquire past the given learning goal of global education. It is clear that the implementation of HRE in primary classrooms has been difficult to track over the years. This is due to the fact there has never been a longitudinal study conducted examining what children know, how its being taught and if they are given the opportunities to learn. Various barriers thus affect the consistent implementation of HRE, which in turn affects the quality of education received by students.

2.1.3 Curriculum Standards

In different countries, the moderation and control of curriculum could be handled by multiple or one level of government. Mundy et al., (2007) noted that the quality of education children receive is correlated to the national curriculum. In Canada, although the federal government signed the CRC, each province and territory is responsible to create it’s own curriculum documents. Therefore the decision to include expectations on human rights and/or children’s rights is ultimately left to the discretion of the Ministries of Education.

In 2013, Ontario’s Ministry of Education revised the Social Studies, History and Geography curriculum document. For the Social Studies section, the Ministry decided to include a citizenship education framework to frame the new expectations. This framework encompasses and teaches active participation, structures, identity and attributes associated to citizenship. The rationale behind the revision was to help children learn and become active, responsible citizens. In accordance to the Social Studies curriculum, the first mention of the CRC is in grade 5. It is
presented as a teacher prompt rather than a specific expectation to be learned. The curriculum expectation outlines that by the end of Grade 5, students will: “describe the major rights and responsibilities associated with citizenship in Canada” (Ontario Ministry of Education & Training, 2013, Page 107). In grade six, the CRC again makes an appearance but again as a teacher prompt or example for the specific expectation. Due to the discretion of their teacher, children may or may not learn about the specific rights they are entitled to, as outlined in the CRC. In 2006, War Child Canada polled groups of Canadian youth and asked them questions on global issues and Canada’s role in the world. The participants included 750 Canadians aged from 15-24 and 524 Canadian aged 25 and older. When asked if they have ever heard of any of the United Nations human rights treaties, 33% replied knowing they had heard about the CRC. The study did not question where they learned about the treaties, but when asked if international treaties on human rights were effective, 10% believed they were very effective and 63% believed they were only somewhat effective. Some youth were clearly aware of human rights treaties, but it is unclear from the study findings how well they understand these treaties or the significance to their own lives.

If the Ministry of Education does not uphold the Convention, it is not surprising that most children do not learn about children’s rights and/or human rights at all. Most curriculum documents highlight the importance of HRE, rather than the more developmentally appropriate and pertinent alternate, children’s rights education. Teachers and educators must take the initiative to implement structures in their learning environments for children to realize their rights and responsibilities. Ultimately, curriculum documents should reflect and teach through a rights-based approach and/or children’s right education framework in primary grades (kindergarten-grade 3). In order for this revision to occur, future research should focus and highlight the longitudinal effects of teaching the CRC to young children.
2.2 Teachers Teaching Children’s Rights

Teachers and educators are at the heart of early learning and care. They are the ones who formally teach children about the nations’ political systems (Howe & Covell, 2010). Cassidy et al. (2014), found that the implementation of citizenship education frameworks depends more on teacher education than the curriculum expectations. Teachers and educators make informed decisions on how to run their classrooms. If they are not uninformed about the CRC, they will either misinform their students or they will neglect to teach the CRC. Teacher’s comfort level and competency with the CRC depended on factors such as professional development and pedagogy, their opinions on power and collaboration with the community.

2.2.1 Professional Development and Pedagogy

In order to teach in the education system, one must obtain accreditation from an education institution. Stellmacher and Sommer (2008) found that most teacher education institutions did not teach human rights or the implementation of HRE to their teacher candidates. Teachers would then feel anxious on teaching their students the CRC because they have not developed an understanding of children’s rights themselves (McEvoy 2007, as cited in Swadener et al. 2013). When reviewing some of Ontario’s Faculty of Education websites, most will have an introduction to the CRC as an elective or have it included as a topic for a Social Studies or Law class. Faculties like University of Western, YORK, Queen’s, University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT) and Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) were just a few faculties reviewed and none had a mandatory course dedicated to the implementation of children’s rights.

Emerson and Lundy (2013) noticed that elementary school teachers were cautious when introducing children’s rights because of controversy, conflict and age appropriateness (as cited in
Swadener, Lundy, Habashi and Blanchet-Cohen, 2013). Furthermore, Di Santo and Kenneally (2014) found that once educators entered the professional field, they were rarely involved in professional development or workshops about children’s rights. This was especially true with educators, working in early learning environments supporting toddlers, preschoolers and kindergartners. These educators felt that children were too young to understand the CRC. Competency is also an issue with teachers and educators. Many teachers did not feel comfortable with teaching citizenship education because they did not know how to link to it pedagogy or curriculum standards. It was often difficult to provide definite examples of articles in the CRC if they were not exemplified in children’s everyday life (Cassidy et al, 2014). Due to egocentric thinking, young children find it difficult to learn about the occurrences in the world if they are not experiencing the problems first hand. Looking at examples that occur in distant countries made it difficult for children to make connections (Chamberlain, 2001; Bromley, 2011, as cited in Cassidy et al. 2014). This became problematic for teachers to provide real life and current examples of their rights being violated. The use of technology can provide assistance to an extent, but children need a frame of reference based on their social, geographical and contextual location. Therefore, disregarding the issues children face globally and providing weak sources of information only creates a bigger gap in their understanding of the CRC and their world.

Howe and Covell (2005) have conducted research on Canadian teachers and children interacting with the CRC for many years. They found that teachers initially had to believe in their abilities to teach their students about the CRC. If they did not have faith in themselves, they would spend too much time doubting learning goals and become hesitant to implement a rights-based framework in their classes. If a teacher is sensitive to the needs and experiences of the children in their class, they are able to integrate children’s rights into their discussions and lessons.
2.2.2 Controversy and Authority

Teachers who were uncomfortable justifying their rights-based discourse or were inexperienced with working with the CRC found it difficult when someone disagreed with their lessons. In 2010, for example, Rapoport found that teachers wanted to avoid controversy over teaching their students about children’s rights. Parents and school administrators disagreed with giving the students the power to know the CRC. In these situations, teachers felt defeated and questioned why they were responsible for teaching children’s rights. In an attempt to diffuse any tensions when initiating children’s rights lessons, Covell and Howe (1999) held information nights for parents and community members to attend. In doing this, parents and community members could have their questions answered candidly, and know exactly what their children would be learning before the lessons even started. Cassidy et al. (2014), found that when teachers had open relationships with their students, parents and school administrators they were more comfortable in sharing their rationale and opinions. They were able to learn about children’s prior experience and use their knowledge of HRE to approach the lessons in a safe, non-discriminatory or degrading way. Children enter into elementary classrooms with prior knowledge and experiences that are different from their peers. Therefore, teachers must be aware and sensitive to the individual needs and support them accordingly.

Di Santo and Kenneally (2014) determined indeed there was a change of power when educators implemented a rights-based discourse in their learning environments. Children’s behaviours promoted a positive classroom climate as their opinions were taken into consideration when they participated and learned in the classroom. The shift from being passive participants to active decision makers enabled children to practice their rights at an early age. Teachers and educators noticed that their students were sharing the power of the classroom management and order. A common fear of teaching children their rights is that children will rebel and disregard
authority’s opinions. However, Cassidy et al. (2014) and Di Santo and Kenneally (2014) discovered that students were able to understand what responsibilities looked like and how their peers and teachers would hold them accountable. Children begin their understanding of citizenship and their rights at an early age, through formal or informal instruction. Providing children with early opportunities to learn and practice the CRC helps them become aware and value political activity and participation (Lawry & Kelly, 2009, as cited in Swadener, et al., 2013).

2.2.3 Beyond the Classroom

A common apprehension teachers have is the inability to foresee their students’ future learning and development. Will the learning and growth done in one grade transcend to the follow years? Speaking contextually, it would be difficult for students in Ontario to retain the CRC if they are not building upon their understanding the year after. Children’s ability to apply their understanding of the CRC and practice it beyond their classrooms is ultimately the goal of children’s rights advocates (Covell and Howe, 1999). Unfortunately, it is not plausible to expect children to retain the CRC and practice their rights if they are not given the opportunities to do so. Decoene and De Cock (1996) found when a society collectively supported children’s rights, children were able to learn the CRC better and extend their understanding into their everyday lives. Howe and Covell (2005) and Mundy et al. (2007) looked at rights-based schools in the United Kingdom and Belgium. The combination of public policy, school initiative and community involvement helped students to build upon their knowledge every year in primary school. These particular societies valued the importance of providing students with the opportunities to learn about the CRC and assisted in developing a critical lens when looking at global issues. Students were able to extend their knowledge past the boundaries of the classroom.
and were able to view themselves as citizens of the world. Teachers were more engaged in these schools as they could turn to others on staff if they had an issue or concern. The partnerships and links made were not only beneficial for the students, but the whole community. Being part of a global community may seem abstract, but seeing how an individual fits within their own community is concrete (Rapoport, 2010).

Teachers and educators are the key agents to our children learning their rights listed in the CRC. Regardless of barriers or factors working against them, teachers who incorporate a rights-based framework or integrate children’s rights education into their classrooms are preparing children to successfully transition into the global community.

2.3 Children Understanding Their Rights

It is evident through nominal research and inquiry there is little regard for teaching children the CRC in elementary classroom. Various societal and social barriers commonly result in the CRC being perceived as socially, age and developmentally inappropriate. Mapp (2011) found that most people, not only teachers, do not engage children in discussion about their rights and their place in the global community because it seems unnecessary. The camouflaging of an important human rights treaty only causes vulnerability, anxiety and fear. Most opposition comes from societal norms that children are properties and entities of their parents and/or the state. The realization and appreciation for the individual child is still disputed by law, religion and attitudes.

2.3.1 Do They Understand?

It can be assumed that teachers do not address children’s rights because the perceived appropriateness and power imbalance of the CRC. This only causes children to create misinformed notions of children’s rights due to their prior knowledge and experience. When instructing a series of human rights lessons, Wade (2004) found that the students were providing
answers based on their misconceptions and prior knowledge. Rather than addressing the misjudgments, Wade disregarded the comments and carried on with her lessons. At the end of her study, she was unsatisfied with the students’ definitions for human rights. She regrets not confronting the misconceptions when they occurred in discussion because they were fixed on their prior knowledge and conceptions with human rights (2004). Vygotsky would classify this as the teacher’s inability to scaffold the incoming information into their students’ existing schematics. The students already had a definition for human rights, and because Wade did not challenge their prior knowledge, their incorrect definitions resonated with the students (2004; Daniels, 2001). Wade (2004) concluded that teachers couldn’t force students to internalize the lessons on human rights. Students have to be cognitively and emotionally connected to the examples given in order to internalize and learn the CRC. Most importantly, the use of approaches and strategies must be conducive to the learning environment and developmental levels of the students. In order for students to make connections to the human rights, they would have needed to see concrete examples in their daily lives. This is important to note when implementing HRE and/or CRE in classrooms. The connections they make when learning the CRC will ultimately impact their interest in becoming politically active in the future.

Voting and political participation is always an issue when a national or provincial election is held. In 2011, Statistics Canada concluded that the only 55.5% of the Canadian youth (18-24) turned out to vote in the federal election. Those who voted felt the need to fulfill their right to vote and politically participate (Uppal & LaRochelle-Cote, 2012). Blais, Gidengil, Nevitte and Nadaeu (2004) found that interest in civic duty and enrolment in higher education were the two biggest indicators of voter turnout. Majority of the young citizens who turned out to vote were university graduates. Those who did not vote said that the election did not grab their political attention and/or they were disinterested in the given election. Therefore concluding education and
political interest as potential determinants in voter turnout. There is no research on the correlation between learning the CRC and the incline of voter participation in political elections. The possibilities of the finding may allow for greater emphasis on the CRC in curriculum documents.

### 2.3.2 Classroom Environment

Children are able to provide candid, raw opinions on world issues and injustice. They see what they like and challenge what they do not. Depending on what type of care and schooling they enter, their voices begin to be silenced and are often given a lens to view the world. In order to maintain order in the classroom, authority figures find ways to regulate speech, behaviors and actions. Howe and Covell (2005) found that classroom management and behavioural issues were the biggest stressors in teacher’s lives. If a teacher cannot manage their class, their teaching instruction was challenged.

As mentioned previously by Rapoport (2010) and Howe and Covell (1999), adults fear that children will challenge authority figures and demand more power once they learn about the CRC. In a pioneering study in 1993-1994, Decoene and De Cock found that after learning about the CRC, primary children were empowered knowing their rights, and became supportive advocates for their classmates. These children behaved in pro-social manners during discussions and lessons, allowing for opinions of their peers to be validated and expressed (1996). Covell and Howe developed a similar study with Canadian students in grades 6, 8 and 12. For each grade, the researchers went into the classrooms and had students help design the children’s rights curriculum they would be learning. Having the students recall what they know and what they would want to know increased the value in learning the CRC. This in turn promoted an engaging, positive classroom climate for students to learn. All studies concluded that students learned they were accountable of their own actions and others in their classrooms. The classes developed
empathy for each other’s needs and opinions and created a communal responsibility for each other’s well being. Even though the mentioned studies were successful, there is still a void of what Canadian children, in primary grades, know about the CRC.

2.3.3 Transition into the Global Community

The UN’s second millennium goal is access to universal primary education (2015). UNESCO has explicitly stated the reasons why children should be receiving quality education:

Education is recognized as an essential condition for human fulfillment, peace, sustainable development, economic growth, decent work, gender equality and responsible global citizenship. It also contributes to reducing inequalities and eradicating poverty, by bequeathing the conditions and generating the opportunities for just, inclusive and sustainable societies (2015)

Mundy et al. (2007) found there is lack of national coordination to prepare children and youth to be integrated into the global community. There needs to be a national precedent set so schools and district boards can be teach children the CRC once they enter elementary school. In order to have children grow into active and informed citizens, we need to start at childhood. Lundy, Kiklkelley, Byrne and Kang (2012) found that a strong Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) presence was important in order to pressure systems of government t create legislation to protect Children’s Rights. They were able to provide statistics and become champions of advocacy for children in their respected countries. The strong downward progression of power from government officials and NGO’s helped to integrate children’s rights education into the national elementary curriculum in twelve countries.

How is political interest and participation maintained once students are out of the classroom? Blanchet-Cohen (2013) found that youth became engaged in political participation
and education when they saw their rights being violated before them. The real life applicability of their rights and freedoms being violated empowers them to take a stand. She interviewed children and youth who witnessed the rise of the Quebec Student Movement in 2011. A political awakening occurred when thousands of university students marched in solidarity to protest the increase in their university tuition. Politicians who supported the rise of tuition fees lost in their ridings because the students voted against them. Blanchet-Cohen concluded that the political movement not only impacted the university students, but the children and youth who witnessed it unfold. The children and youth were able to see how people in their communities united for a collective cause and participated to create a more fair society. It sparked their curiosity and interests in political processes, redefined their schemas of citizenship and gave them a reason to participate in politics (2013, as cited in Swadener et al. 2013). Explicit examples of rights being violated help children to develop a contextual understanding of the CRC and how their actions affect the global community.

2.4 Conclusion

It has been twenty-six years since the CRC has been created; yet many children are not aware of their rights. The Government of Canada signed and ratified the CRC, yet Canadian children typically learn about citizenship and political participation informally through conservations and experiences outside of school more so than through opportunities to learn about children’s rights through formal learning. A province/territory’s curriculum content is guided by the expectations, frameworks and approaches provided by the Ministry of Education. It has been found that most Social Studies curriculum documents favour HRE as their main framework to teach citizenship, placing an emphasis on “rights and responsibilities” more generally speaking. The small body of research on children’s rights education in the classrooms
underscores the need for further research in this area, and specifically for more understanding of how teachers are creating opportunities for students to learn about their rights

Teachers and educators are the ones guiding students when they learn about their global community. Their pedagogical frameworks, strategies and lessons are how students learn the content. From the body of research reviewed, it is clear that many teachers are not introduced to the topic of children’s rights in teachers college, and are not commonly provided with professional development on this topic either. Research also has identified further barriers to this work, including teacher beliefs about children, their concerns about upsetting them, and their preference for avoiding conflict and confrontation with parents and school administrators. The findings from this research study will help inform how such barriers might be minimized by interviewing teachers who have a commitment to this topic to learn from them how they approach it and why, and to hear from them how their students respond to this topic. It is my hope that these findings will help more teachers become interested in and committed to implemented children’s rights-based approach.

The most significant findings that were found were directly linked to the children. They ultimately are the ones receiving the education, but do they really understand the magnitude of the CRC? Children, who were living in societies in which promoted the CRC or had situations where children’s rights were violated, were able to fully understand, participate and practice the CRC. They were able to make connections between the CRC and the events occurring before them. Learning became salient once children are emotionally and connected to the CRC. The conclusions drawn from the research provides a general sense of what a small sample of children are capable in terms of learning and practicing the CRC. Further research needs to be conducted on the longitudinal effects of the CRC and the political participation/inactivity of children who
have learned the CRC at an early age. In the next chapter, I review the methodology used in my research study.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I report the research methods I used to design and conduct this research study. I designed this research using a qualitative approach that involved semi-structured interviews as my primary instrument of data collection. Sampling and interviewing a small sample of elementary teachers allowed for detailed and focused responses. These teachers were sampled based on a set criteria and recruitment process. Each interview was then transcribed, and analyzed into specific categories to create coherent and relative themes. The research study has been monitored and reviewed by ethical review procedures and protocols set by the University of Toronto. In this chapter, I review these details as well as the methodological strengths and limitations.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This research project was conducted as a qualitative research study. Due to the limited research and awareness of the implementation of a rights-based approach in elementary classrooms, it was important to interview a small population of teachers who would help create a detailed understanding of the possibilities and implications. As Creswell (2008) explained, qualitative research can help establish and make sense of new occurrences in the world, specifically in the educational field. The nature of qualitative research can allow the researchers to behave and interact in a social context when collecting data from the participants. It was crucial for the current research study to be approached this way in order to minimize power relations between the participants and researcher, as the participant has a practical, emotional and social connection to the research problem. I prompted the participants using the interview protocol but allowed them to elaborate through their examples and experiences.
I designed this qualitative research to focus on learning about teachers’ pedagogy, attitudes and implementation strategies for teaching children’s rights. The need to interview elementary teachers was due to the fact there is a shortage of information on what young children are being taught in terms of their own rights. By speaking with elementary teachers committed to this topic, I had the opportunity to learn about their lived experiences undertaking their initiatives in their classroom. Learning about their experiences and opportunities to teach and implement rights-based approaches can inform educational change. King (2003) put simply that people recreate stories of injustice and oppression because they are fearful of change. Without the discussion or integration of change into our lives, we continue to retell stories of oppression, naiveté and isolation. The disregard for the CRC in elementary classrooms continues to oppress and isolate children until they are legally recognized as a citizen of the nation.

3.2 Instrument of Data Collection

The primary instrument of data collection was a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). Semi-structured interviews were conducted because I was interested in obtaining information from a few exceptional educators. Semi-structured interviews created the opportunity to provide clarification on misconceptions and provide insight on the implementation of children’s rights in their classrooms. The interviews were unique as they allowed the participants and I to engage in a conversation like manner as I collected data. Creswell (2007) remarks that the open-ended questions and nature of the interview allows for flexibility and flow of conversation. Participants are positioned as the insider with valuable information. The researcher is seeking to gain insight and gather in depth information. Responses to the questions are instantaneous and the interview questions are further developed in light of participant responses.
There are limitations of the use of semi-structured interviews for qualitative research. Creswell (2007), for example, explained how data could be affected by elements of the interview. The interviewer could have an affect and control the conversation. This in turn may compromise the data’s reliability.

3.3 Participants

The participants of this research study were recruited based on a set sampling criteria. They had to meet the criteria in order to be recruited for the research study. Each individual’s biography is also presented in order to provide his or her educational background and experiences.

3.3.1-Sampling Criteria

The participants of this research study had to meet the following sampling criteria in order to participate:

- Be an Ontario Certified Teacher, in good standing
- Have taught, or currently be teaching, elementary grades (kindergarten – Grade 6)
- Have taught for at least 5 years, with at least 1 year of experience implementing a rights-based approach in their classroom
- Have demonstrated a commitment, leadership, and/or expertise in the area of children’s rights education.

In order to find participants, the parameters of my search had to be broadened. The participants had to be Ontario teachers due to the scope of my audience. It was important for the teachers to be currently teaching or have taught in an elementary school. I wished to seek information from teachers who could speak to at least 5 years of teaching experience and at least 1 year of experience implementing a rights-based approach. Finally, it was crucial for the
teachers to have developed some leadership and/or expertise in the field of children’s rights in order for me to know that they would have substantive experience to speak to.

3.3.2-Sampling Procedure

The time constraints and small-scale nature of this research study affected how the participants were sampled. The participants for this study were sampled and recruited using purposeful and convenience sampling. Creswell explains that sites or individuals are chosen specifically based on their availability and accessibility (2008). I had to use sampling strategies, which were flexible and dynamic (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, as cited in Creswell, 2008). The participants were purposefully sampled to fit the sampling criterion, as they were able to speak to the issues surrounding the implementation of rights-based approaches in primary classrooms. The participants were recruited based on recommendations from colleagues. I contacted the participants through email, which detailed my research study and included a consent form (see Appendix A). Once they replied back, we arranged a time to conduct the interview. By using convenience sampling, it helped save time due to the time constraints but it sacrificed the validity of information (Miles and Huberman, 1994, as cited in Creswell, 2008). The number of elementary teachers implementing rights-based programming is limited, so it was difficult to be selective of my participants. When I connected with the teachers, I sent the consent form and my contact information to follow up our initial encounter. In doing this, the participants did not feel obliged to volunteer and willingly agreed to participate.

3.3.3 Participant Biographies

Diane

The first participant was Diane and she had been teaching various grades for seven years. She taught science and outdoor education in the past but at the time of the interview she was
teaching visual arts for students in kindergarten to grade five at a private school in Toronto. Diane taught using an inquiry-based approach as part of the IB curriculum. At the time of the interview she approached children’s rights through a grade three inquiry unit in visual arts.

*Jaime*

Jaime had been a classroom teacher for five years. He started as an educator in outdoor education and had taught along the spectrum from grades two to grade twelve. He completed his Ph.D. with a focus on Haitian youths participation in their country’s post-earthquake reconstruction. At the time of the interview, Jaime was teaching in an Ontario Faculty of Education.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

As mentioned in previous sections, the data was recorded with a voice recording application and physical notes. The audio files were then transcribed into transcriptions. The interviews were separated into distinct Microsoft Word documents and labeled with their pseudonym alias. The transcribed interviews and additional field notes were saved into Microsoft Word documents. Miles and Huberman (1994) would classify this as the start of the data reduction phase for qualitative data analysis. The abstraction of the data helped me make decisions on how this data will help focus my research study. Each word document was sent to its corresponding participants to be fact checked. Once approved, each transcription was coded into categories and finally into themes. This marked the beginning of the data display stage (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Data must be displayed in coherent and distinct themes in order to draw reasonable conclusions. For this research study each category in the transcript was highlighted with a different color. Within each category, I identified multiple themes that involved correlation and divergence between participants.
3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

In order to collect and analyze data for this research study, two semi-structured interviews were conducted in accordance with the University of Toronto Research Ethics protocol approved for the Masters of Teaching Program. Two elementary teachers were sampled and contacted based on convenience and referrals. When they were contacted, they were sent a consent form, which briefly outlined the research study and the conditions of participating. The consent form also confirmed that there were no known risks involved with participation. Participants were reassured that their participation was voluntary and at any point they could withdraw from the study. As well, they were informed that they were not obliged to answer all the questions asked. The willing elementary teachers agreed to become participants by signing the consent form and setting up potential interview times. Their responses were recorded using the voice memo application on a password protected iPhone application. I also took notes using pen and paper of important details. The interview was then transcribed on Microsoft Word program and saved on a password-protected computer. Each interview was filed under the pseudonym name and identifying data excluded. I have primary access to the data, and participants were notified that my course instructor would also have access to raw data. The data will be stored for up to 5 years after which it will be destroyed.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

The methodology used for this research study had limitations due to the nature of qualitative research. The first limitation was the primary use of interviews for the research study. A lot of preparation and planning went into conducting interviews. Authorization through consent had to be obtained before the interview started. I had to consider how the open-ended questions would be asked and in what order. Once the interview was over, I had to transcribe the
notes they had made and/or listen to the recording of the interview. At times it was difficult to hear or read what the participant said which affected the validity of the data. Additionally, the primary use of interviews hindered the possibility of a holistic approach to the study. The inability to conduct fieldwork or gather observations alongside interviews affected my overall understanding of the participant’s experiences. As Patton (1987) has argued, it is difficult to fully understand their participant’s experiences unless they are able to observe and interact with the participant’s environment. I could only validate their information through the transcripts of the interviews.

The final limitation to the study was the participants. The sample included only two teachers. Thus, the results could not be generalized to a broader population. Furthermore, limiting the selected participants to only teachers meant that student’s experiences and perspectives were excluded. Due to ethical reasons, I was unable to gather data from any students.

The methodology did generate many benefits for the research study. The entire research study allowed me space to be reflexive throughout the process. The process of inquiry allowed me to engage in metacognitive thinking and consider the overall benefits of the methodology. According to Collins, Karsenti and Komis (2013), one must engage in meaning reflection, where it is a blend of action (what is implemented in the classroom) and discourse (the way teachers practice). I was able to engage in grounded reflective practice as I actively sought out information to my research problem and reflected on the participants’ experiences. Not only was I learning about my participant’s observations and insights, I was able to reflect on the context and circumstances in which right’s-based approaches thrive in.

Firstly, semi-structured interviews allowed me to learn about teacher’s instructional practices. The open-ended questions allowed the participant to not only answer the questions but
to elaborate using experiences from their classroom or their personal opinions. Participants were encouraged to provide extensive and comprehensive answers.

As well, the interviews were used to inquire about the participant’s lived experiences in the classroom. It was important to understand their attitudes, rationales and beliefs on implementing a rights-based approach in their primary classrooms. As Patton (1987) explains, interviews create the opportunity to look at unique participants and inductively analyze their experiences. The small glimpse into their perspectives opens up opportunity to further inform policy, curriculum and teacher education programs. The findings also inform my own pedagogical considerations and theoretical approaches.

3.7 Conclusion

In closing, the selected methodology was beneficial for the goal of my qualitative research study. The qualitative research structure allowed for an overall analysis of a selected few teachers in Ontario. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to gain insight into the participant’s experiences. They allowed me to understand the context in which they are implementing rights-based approaches. The small glimpse in their experiences allows for new conversations on policy change and what future primary classrooms could look like. Next, in chapter 4, I report my research findings from the semi-structured interviews with my participants.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter will report my findings and discuss their significance in light of the literature. The synthesis of data is presented in the following eight themes (with corresponding subthemes): (1) key experiences that informed these teachers commitment and preparation included traveling abroad, and collaboration with colleagues; (2) teachers believed they had a professional responsibility to teach their young students about children’s rights; (3) these teachers capitalized on collaboration with colleagues, discussion with students and academic resources to further their understanding on the implementation of the CRC; (4) teachers taught the CRC using a cross-curricular approach (5) these teachers used assessment for, as and of learning to evaluate students’ understanding of CRC; (6) classroom design and structure played a role in these teachers’ approaches to promote the CRC; (7) learning outcomes and benefits that these teachers have observed included developing global consciousness, interest in authentic participation and developing their “voice” from a young age; (8) challenges the teachers faced implementing rights-based education spanned institutional barriers, recreating systems of oppression and developing a deeper understanding.

4.1 Key experiences that informed these teachers commitment and preparation included traveling abroad, and collaboration with colleagues

This theme emerged as the research participants spoke extensively about their own teaching experience and how their interest in social justice or rights-based work helped them develop an interest in children’s rights in the classroom. Their classroom experiences, locally or overseas, helped cultivate their interest in the area and learn how to extend their students’ learning.
Both of my research participants had taught in elementary classrooms for a number of years and were Ontario certified teachers. Jaime reflected that his own experiences were like any other elementary teacher, as he “[taught] the gamut.” Along with their many years teaching various grade levels, both of them have taught outdoor education at the elementary level. During their many years of teaching, Jaime and Diane did not mention learning about the implementation of rights-based education in teacher’s college or professional development workshops. This null data aligned with the findings that most teacher education institutions or professional development workshops do not provide a specific focus on children’s rights education (Stellmacher & Sommer, 2008; Di Santo & Kenneally, 2014). These findings point to some alternative pathways for teachers to become interested in teaching the CRC.

The participants indicated different experiences that influenced their interest in implementing the CRC in their classrooms. For example, once Diane implemented a rights-based approach in her art classroom she became interested in making the process more thought provoking for her students. This was her second year teaching a unit on children’s rights, and she had made adjustments to her approach. She wanted her students to continue their inquiry and produce paintings that emphasize their understanding in a “meaningful and not just a superficial representation.” Diane would collaborate with the students’ homeroom teacher to continue the learning and further inquiry in her classroom. She would activate the students’ prior knowledge during the brainstorming or minds-on of the lesson, which would also act as a diagnostic assessment of the students’ understanding of the CRC. The IB curriculum emphasized the need for consistent inquiry across the curriculum. In turn, Diane found that she needed to collaborate with other teachers in order to plan and build upon the students’ existing knowledge. Although Diane approached children’s rights through this specific unit, she was also interested in how
other teachers were implementing rights-based approaches and hoped to learn from their successes.

Even though Diane was required to teach the CRC, both participants said that teachers do have a choice to implement rights-based approaches in their classroom. It is just a matter of implementing it from the start, so it does not interfere with existing classroom management or programming. Jaime expressed how his overseas/abroad experience in international development helped initiate his interest in student voice and how children’s rights vary based on geographical location. He would allocate time in the classroom schedule to hold weekly meetings and have students express their ideas or issues they were holding. This type of discussion has been tested in other studies, but has proven unsuccessful when taught to younger students (Chamberlain, 2001; Bromley 2011, as cited in Cassidy et al., 2014). Young children have difficulty grasping concepts that they are unable to witness or attest to. So, Jaime’s experiences abroad provoked areas for further inquiry pertaining to children’s rights because they were vivid and based of his true experiences. Students were able to use him as resource to help guide their inquiry of how reconstruction of a society looks like and its relation to children’s rights. In order to better prepare his approach, he engaged in critical thinking and read up on the issues of implementing children’s rights.

Even though the research showed that teachers who have not received formal learning about children’s rights usually do not typically implement it in their classrooms (Emerson and Lundy as cited in Swadener et al, 2013), these participants demonstrated how informal learning opportunities can help prepare teachers for this work. In order to prepare themselves, the participants found academic resources, support from other teachers or drew upon overseas experiences to help them develop a deeper understanding on how to implement the CRC. These various outlets of information helped alleviate any anxiety or discomfort around teaching the
CRC (McEvoy, 2007, as cited in Swadener et al. 2013). They highlight the importance of staying informed of the issues and of students’ understanding in order to provide authentic and meaningful lessons. Jaime stated that “if a teacher is interested, they should be thinking and reading about those issues.” This finding points to the significance of life-long learning in the area of children’s rights and the need to stay on top of reading and scholarship in this area.

4.2 Teachers believed they had a professional responsibility to teach their young students about children’s rights

Diane and Jaime were able to provide a glimpse into what teaching about children’s rights looked like in their elementary classrooms. This information fills the void that was left when there were systematic barriers affecting implementation. In 2008, Stellmacher and Sommers found that there was minimal research around the implementation of HRE in elementary schools. Furthermore, it has been found that there are social and institutional barriers to engaging children in discussion of their rights. Rapoport (2012) found that HRE and CRE was hardly mentioned in any primary curriculum documents and Mapp (2011) discovered that not only teachers but most adults refrained from engaging in discussion because there was a fear that children would challenge authority, if they began to learn about their rights. The findings from the literature presented many pedagogical barriers teachers faced when implementing rights-based approaches. There were limited cases of teachers defying these barriers and successfully implementing rights-based approaches in their classrooms. The research participants offered an insight into what they know, how they defined the CRC and why it was their professional responsibility to teach the CRC.
4.2.1 Teachers’ defining and demonstrating their knowledge of the CRC

When articulating their understanding of Children’s Rights, both participants referenced back to the CRC. Diane explained that children’s rights are “the rights that every single child in this world should be entitled to meet their needs, to have a safe and fulfilling life.” Jaime spoke to this notion as well, but added that there are barriers surrounding the protection and fulfillment of Children’s Rights. There is no universal guarantee that Children’s Rights will be upheld once the country has signed the Convention. For instance, the Canadian federal government signed the CRC in 1990 and promised to take action to uphold these rights through mandated policy; yet the United Nations committee has found that Canada has made no efforts since (UNICEF Canada, 2012). Jaime demonstrated that he understood the issues underpinning the adoption and definition of CRC in Canada, as well as the global community. He deduced his final definition as “children’s rights are making decisions with the best interest of children in mind. But very closely related to that is having children’s voice.” All these insights demonstrated that these teachers have critically analyzed and researched about children’s rights before introducing it to their classes. This aligns with the research McEvoy (2007) put forth about teachers who were educated about the Conventions and their ability to answer difficult questions competently and confidently (as cited in Swadener et al. 2013).

4.2.2 Participants believed that they had a professional responsibility to teach children’s rights

The data disclosed a commonality within the participants’ responses in respect to the teachers’ professional responsibility to teach and create opportunities for their students to learn the CRC. Both participants remarked how teachers have the ability to empower their students and to create opportunities for children to critically think. This data paralleled reports on how
successful children’s rights teachers were sensitive to the needs and experiences of their students (Howe and Covell, 2005). Teachers not only understood the need to teach the CRC, but found ways to engage their students in meaningful conversations. Diane’s comment here reinforces this finding:

If we don’t talk about rights or environmental sustainability, then I think we are missing a huge opportunity to create a more socially and environmentally just world…the way we approach education, affects some of the way children view the world.

Diane also highlighted that anyone who interacts with children has the responsibility to engage them in conversations around social justice. Jaime’s comment also reflected that notion when he stated the “responsibility of the teachers [is] to know their student.” Students come from various backgrounds and demographics, and these factors influence how they receive and respond to the Convention. Teachers must be sensitive in the way they approach the topic in order to effectively instruct their students. Diane and Jaime articulated their professional responsibility in their responses. Their students came from a range of low-middle class to affluent families, as well as varying ages and cultures. Regardless of social status, age or background, both participants provided opportunities for their students to address the CRC and practice it within the classroom. Diane and Jaime were able to address the student’s misconceptions or prior knowledge of the CRC through their discussions. They were able to clarify any notions before moving through their units. The differences in teaching strategy and approach made learning more effective and salient, unlike Wade’s research conducted in 2004.

Part of their professional responsibility to teach Children’s Rights is to integrate it seamlessly into the curriculum content rather than teaching it as a separate unit. Diane, for example, explained: “I don’t just start off and say, ‘okay, we are doing a unit on children’s rights.” Jaime, similarly, explained: “I didn’t [directly] teach the conventions in my classroom,
and I don’t think I ever did…some people are deliberate human rights teachers and I don’t know if I came across with that particular label.” These anecdotes provide an interesting explanation to how children’s rights were embedded into their practice and approach, even though they did not explicitly teach it in their classrooms. These educators did not label themselves as human rights/children’s rights teachers. This would narrow their pedagogy and instructional strategies to just rights-based education. Instead, they infused elements of rights-based education into their classrooms to have it seamlessly integrated into their teaching strategies and approach. They are first and foremost professionally recognized teachers; their work with the CRC compliments their approaches in the classroom.

4.3 These teachers capitalized on a range of resources like collaboration with colleagues, discussion with students and academic literature to further their understanding on the implementation of the CRC.

This theme emerged as the participants brought forth a range of resources they used to support their classroom instruction and understanding of the CRC. With limited research from the field, these findings bring light to where teachers access their informational resources.

Diane emphasized that she primarily relied on the conversations with the homeroom teachers to help her prepare for the unit on children’s rights. She was able to continue the conversations and learning done in the students’ homeroom into her own classroom. She did not refer to any academic or professional resources to further her understanding of the CRC. This null data revealed that she depended on the discussions and conversations with the students and her colleagues to guide her implementation. In order to utilize her art period effectively, she strategized and planned her lessons based on the discussions the students had in their previous class. She also referred to the United Nations’ book, *A Life Like Mine*, that the students used at
the start of the inquiry unit. Jaime also used resources from the United Nations, and specifically referred to the CRC as one of his primary resources. He had used journal articles to help him deconstruct the notion of rights, especially the frameworks surrounding citizenship and privilege. He had brought some of these journal articles into his classes at the faculty of education where he was currently working as well. His instructional strategies and use of resources allows new teacher candidates to learn about children’s and human rights, and how it could be implemented in schools.

As he had himself completed research in this area, he was able to interview groups of Haitian youth who were participating in the reconstruction of their society. Using ethno-graphic approaches, he was able to learn how the youth were responding to these programs. These first hand accounts allowed him to critically think how CRC and participation may differ in other countries, and what factors play in to authentic participation. He explained, “through a lot of these overseas experiences [it places] different dimensions on children’s rights and human rights in general.” Jaime was able to draw upon many experiences and resources to help him better understand how to authentically implement the CRC, whereas Diane relied on collaborating with her colleagues and building upon her students’ prior knowledge.

4.4 Teachers taught the CRC using a cross-curricular approach

With no clear integration of rights-based education across primary curriculum documents, it can be difficult to assess where it fits within the curriculum. When the Ontario Ministry of Education revised the Social Studies curriculum, they changed their framework and expectations to be open-ended to have students develop inquiry and research skills. It is ultimately up to the teachers to facilitate and engage their students in learning the CRC within the prescribed elementary curriculum. Jamie and Diane used different curriculum documents and frameworks
mandated by their schools, but they were creative and flexible with working with the documents to integrate the CRC. The data collected helped provide a range of ways these teachers built upon the students’ prior knowledge and linked the CRC to various curriculum subjects other than Social Studies.

4.4.1 Teachers underscored students’ prior knowledge and relationships with the CRC to further students’ inquiry.

Children come into formal schooling with a different relationship to the CRC. For some, it may be the first time learning about it and for others it may not be. Both participants highlighted the importance of developmentally and age appropriate practice, but Jaime noted that teachers must “understand the students' relationship with rights” before they engage their students into inquiry. As stated previously, students come from varying backgrounds, but Jaime found that his students thought and understood children’s rights “in terms of their own background and their own communities and families.” Therefore, it is important to engage students in dialogue, while remaining sensitive to the students’ background and their notions around children’s rights. Diane described that her students “would have had some exposure” learning simple conventions, like the right to respect themselves and other children, throughout their elementary education. These primary lessons and introductions to the CRC help build students’ understanding for complex discussions in later grades. During the brainstorming period of her unit, Diane had students tell her which rights they remembered and assessed which ones “got them really fired up.” The students’ excitement directed her to pick which rights would hold her students’ engagement and focus. These teachers demonstrated ways to underscore their students’ prior knowledge and relationship with the CRC in order to help scaffold their learning. Although these participants are a small representation of Ontario teachers, there is still a large percentage of teachers not teaching
the CRC. By grade 3, the IB Curriculum has a set expectation for students to learn the CRC but in the Ontario Curriculum, it is a suggested teaching prompt in Grade 5. However, War Child Canada (2006) revealed that only 10% of Canadian youth said that human right treaties, like the CRC, were very effective. The data did not conclude if the Canadian youth understood human rights treaties and were taught in school about them but it does reveal that only a small percentage of them believed they were effective. The findings from this study and literature demonstrated that effective strategies and approaches must be outlined, in order for students to recognize the importance of the CRC in promoting social justice and anti-oppressive behaviour.

4.4.2 Teachers used a variety of frameworks to frame learning and understanding of the CRC

Each participant used different frameworks to facilitate learning and understanding of the CRC. At the time of the interview, it would have been Diane’s second time collaborating with the elementary teachers for the children’s rights unit. Each year, she has used varying instructional approaches to facilitate inquiry. In her first year, she took what she said was “a broad approach” to teaching the CRC. She allowed her students to make their own decisions and guide their own learning by picking an article of the Convention to focus on. In contrast to her most recent practice, she had the whole class target one of the rights, in order to develop a better understanding of the conditions to uphold that right. Diane’s ability to switch from a broad to narrow approach demonstrates the flexibility in teaching the CRC, in order to achieve different learning goals. In turn, this would help with her future implementation, and reflection on learning goals and outcomes. In comparison, Jaime explained how he had linked various frameworks to integrate children’s rights:

Through critical multicultural education, critical global citizenship education, student centred approaches, often outdoor or experiential education can get at
these things… it goes in the foray of multicultural education and critical multicultural education.

The complexity of Jaime’s answer did not reveal a definitive framework within which he chose to frame children’s rights. This answer parallels with the findings concluded by Stellmacher and Sommers (2008). They concluded that it was difficult to track the progression of successful rights-based classrooms because primary and secondary schools often start by using a CRE or HRE framework and then switch to a different citizenship framework, similar to the frameworks Jaime mentioned above. Although children’s rights can be flexibly used in different citizenship or inquiry frameworks, there are insufficient results of a singular framework to formulate what works best.

4.4.3 Teachers linking and integrating the CRC to various elementary curriculum subjects

Due to the lack of research and curricular expectations surrounding children’s rights, it is difficult to locate specific expectations other than in the Social Studies and History curriculum. Due to the ambiguous location of children’s rights in the curriculum, this could be a barrier to implementing rights-based approaches in their classrooms. Alternatively, Diane and Jaime found multiple ways of linking the CRC to various elementary curriculum subjects. Diane remarked that there is “no conflict of integrating children’s rights in either [the] Ontario or IB Curriculum…there is almost always an opportunity,” if the teacher chooses to focus on it. The classroom teacher has to take initiative and understand how to integrate the CRC meaningfully in the classroom. Jaime said that teachers may feel bound to the curriculum, but if they look creatively enough they can “get at children’s rights through other disciplines and other fields of thinking.” Both participants found ways of integrating the CRC within different curricular subjects.
Since Diane’s art class was primarily focused on making art, she explained that the students would be creating a painting project to link their knowledge to children’s rights. Their homeroom teacher did most of their inquiry and discussion in their Social Studies inquiry class. With that being said, she created opportunities within class to talk and further their understanding of the CRC. She had students accompany their painting with an artist’s statement, where she expected them to explain their thinking of children’s rights and how their “art can be [seen as] more than just a visual piece.” Diane wanted her students to see themselves as activists, creating their art piece to deliver a message and serve a purpose. Posing students as change-makers helped them push past the boundaries and typical expectations of visual arts. Students for this particular lesson focused on the work of Keith Herring, and used his work as a style rather than an expectation. Opposed to approaching the CRC as an isolated lesson, similar to what the research has revealed, she chose to link the CRC into the inquiry based framework through art and literacy. Her approach to planning an integrated unit across curricular subjects and classes demonstrated her creativeness and flexibility in the classroom.

While Diane’s class was focused on art, Jaime found various curricular subjects to link the CRC. Firstly, Jaime mentioned the integration of the CRC while engaged in critical literacy activities. When working with older elementary students, novel studies could “offer a visual illustration in the kid’s minds.” Especially when working with an abstract and sometimes confusing subject like the CRC, stories can help introduce issues for children. Novel studies were a great way of interpreting different perspectives and experiencing new ways of life. Students were able to inquire and develop their critical literacy skills by being exposed to social injustices in the text. As Jaime previously stated, it is incredibly difficult to teach about children’s rights unless you teach it comparatively. Within the Social Studies and History curriculum, teachers can have students look at the CRC cross culturally, the various state policies connected to rights and
how different countries uphold the CRC. When discussing other societies, he brought his experience and research from other countries and spoke to the societal parameters in order to guarantee rights. More complex inquiries into global issues and various factors in securing rights can be scaffolded in a Global/World Issues class. Furthermore, in Mathematics students can calculate the total revenue for a household in a developing country to sustain a quality lifestyle (according to the provisions of human rights). He remarked that Mathematics is an interesting curricular connection that may be disregarded because there is no obvious link to the CRC. As a professor at a Faculty of Education, Jaime challenged his teacher candidates to push past the Social Studies and History curriculum and think of the curriculum as flexible document. The synthesized data demonstrated that these educators are finding multiple curricular subjects to frame the CRC. Teachers have to be flexible in viewing the curriculum document, and find opportunities of integrating the CRC within the existing expectations.

4.5 These teachers used assessment for, as and of learning to evaluate students’ understanding of CRC

As mentioned in a prior section, both participants underscored the students’ past experiences and relationships with the CRC before any lesson was implemented. Diane was able to provide examples of using formative, diagnostic and summative assessments to track and scaffold learning in their classrooms, while the Jaime hardly spoke to it. Jamie noted that he was attentive to his students’ issues and worries during weekly meetings and used those moments to assess how he would be building students’ autonomy and voice based on their needs. He made an effort to model interactions that demonstrate respect and authentic participation, so his students could model those behaviours when speaking to one another. Similarly, during the whole class
brainstorming time, some students in Diane’s class brought up rights they were able to recall. She judged their understanding and knowledge of the right by their level of excitement.

Diane also used a variety of diagnostic assessment strategies, which directly involved the students. As a class they developed the criteria to which their final project would be graded upon. Diane explained that the “criteria was mostly visual arts criteria as well as the message behind their artwork.” She found it difficult to check in with each student, so she had students conduct pair-share critiques before the submission of their final product. This allowed students to collaborate and voice their opinions constructively. At the end of some of her classes, she had students write guided exit tickets so she could check in on the students’ reflection as they progressed through the unit. In the end, Diane used a range of summative assessments. She had students conduct “a self-assessment as well as a teacher assessment.” Part of the teacher assessment was a short conversation where she asked “them to reflect to me, verbally, about what they were proud of, and how this [project] represented that right.” Students demonstrated more evidence of reflection, in the end, than they did at the beginning of the project. This was because more students were able to clarify their understanding about the CRC in the end as opposed to the start. She concluded that sometimes her students were able to convey their thoughts more thoroughly than what they wrote in their artist statements. Diane’s range of assessments allowed her to not only assess her students’ work but the effectiveness of her own instruction as the unit progressed. Her own conclusions helped her to reflect on what worked and what needed to be improved upon the following year.

These findings shed light on the various assessment and evaluation tools used when teaching children’s rights. Jaime and Diane’s experience with using a variety of assessment tools and strategies provides a contrast to Wade’s (2004) findings. He found that ineffective instruction affected students’ ability to develop a deeper understanding, which affected the summative
assessment results. Specifically Diane’s ongoing assessments helped guide her students’ learning and the methods of instruction in her classroom. Her use of strategies provides a contrast to the limited findings on prior assessments.

### 4.6 The outcomes of effective classroom design and structure to promote CRC

Effective classroom management and co-constructed classroom norms have proven to be one of the biggest challenges in teaching. Howe and Covell (2005) found that teachers who struggled with classroom management and issues were least likely to implement the CRC because it may encourage students to become more defiant against authority figures. Contrary to the research, the participants explained that when their classrooms had an underlying current of children’s rights, it promoted a positive learning environment for everyone. Jamie and Diane emphasized inquiry and student-centred approaches in their classrooms. Jaime recommended that the classrooms should have an open design to spark curiosity and promote conversation. Additionally, students’ work should be displayed to showcase their effort and achievements. Also, students should be “encouraged to be able to express and share from their own [experiences and] backgrounds.” This tied into Diane’s only rule in her classroom, which is respect. Students are reminded to respect themselves, other peers, the materials and the environment. The integration of children’s rights in the design and structure of the classroom allowed for open discussion and promoted a safe learning environment.

### 4.7 Learning outcomes and benefits that these teachers have observed included developing global consciousness, and developing children’s “voice” from a young age.

Decoene & De Cock (1996) and Covell & Howe (1999) conducted studies on the benefits of learning children’s rights in primary classrooms. Contrary to societal belief, they observed children took what they learned and began contributing to a positive classroom climate by
respecting one another. The participants confirmed this in their responses, as they did not identify any defiant behaviour. However, they articulated their observations and clarified their perceived benefits of learning the CRC. Diane even remarked that “maybe at the beginning they didn’t seem to have such an in-depth understanding” about children’s rights, but towards the end, she was surprised at the connections and insights her students brought forward.

4.7.1 Developing global consciousness and understanding of their world

The participants linked their learning goals to developing their students’ global consciousness. In her classroom, Diane had her students think of their own personal experiences and link it “to global or more international mindedness.” The students brainstormed and talked about how they have access to most rights of the CRC. Grounding the conversation with the students’ prior knowledge helped extend their conversations to how, for example, “different people might access food”. These discussions not only addressed the students’ privilege of having their rights upheld, but also began the conversation of access and guaranteeing these rights. This opened up the dialogue and had children begin to think more about how rights can be violated in varying contexts. These initial conversations were essential to come back to when students were writing their artist statements at the end of the unit. Cassidy et al. (2014) found that a common barrier teachers found was linking these rights infringements to the students’ privileged lives. In order for privileged students, it was important Jaime and Diane to provide the students with examples of other children experiencing their rights violated. Young students need concrete examples to refer to when learning about an abstract concept like rights. According to Jaime, he found that “thinking about the right to education is a harder concept to deal with if you don’t talk about it comparatively.” This quote can encapsulate all forty-four rights in the CRC as they may be seen as abstract concepts to students. Like Diane’s class, Jaime had his students
inquire how children from other countries exercise their rights and participate in their society. He would often bring his experiences abroad, but he would also encourage his students to research how children’s rights differ in different parts of the world. He wanted his students to understand that “rights really only matter if you don’t have them or if you can strongly emphasize with people who don’t have them.” Providing his students with these two dichotomies allowed them to build a broader understanding of rights and shape their perceptions on empathy. Students were encouraged to critically think about social justice issues and provide critical responses that targeted injustice or oppression.

4.7.2 Encouraging voice and authentic participation from an early age

Although there has been a breadth of research completed in pre-school to later elementary classrooms on the implementation of the CRC, there has not been a conclusive answer to when children should learn children’s rights. Both participants stated that early childhood would be the optimal time to introduce children’s rights. Jaime remarked there are developmentally appropriate ways to introduce and encourage voice as early as birth. He regarded children to be “very curious early and have these amazing insightful questions all the time.” Diane indicated a reasonable age is when they can understand a basic conversation, more specifically around kindergarten. She remarked that there is “always a developmentally appropriate way to talk about rights.”

Students in the participants’ class always had opportunities to express their opinions and voice their thoughts. In Diane’s art class, each student was given the autonomy to choose a right to focus their project on. To compliment their painting, students had to write an artist statement that strongly linked their understanding of that right and demonstrated a connection to it. In Jaime’s class, he tried to provide various means and opportunities for his students to voice their
opinions and actively participate in his classroom. He wanted his students to practice identifying issues of social justice and responding to them appropriately. An example he brought forth was having open conversations about social issues in the students’ lives. One time, he asked his students provide appropriate and inappropriate responses if they were to encounter a homeless person. These conversations allowed his students to express their opinions and attitudes while facilitating a conversation around political and social barriers in which prevent homeless people from getting off the streets. By allowing his students to voice their opinion and addressing the violation of rights homeless people experience, he was preparing his students to advocate for others and empower them to participate authentically. As he puts it simply, “children are not children forever.” Children need to learn to advocate for other children, and use their voice to make a change. The mobilization of children’s rights advocates begins with children themselves.

None of the teachers suggested that their students began to act out in opposition of authority once they learned about their rights. This null data suggests that learning the CRC does not mean making children feel entitled and encourage defiant behaviour. Giving children the opportunities to be active decision makers and participants in their own learning environment can positively change the classroom climate (Di Santo & Kenneally, 2014) to one wherein children practice their rights and engage in pro-social behaviour with their peers. Diane and Jaime gave their students opportunities to practice their autonomy and make decisions that affected their learning environment. In return, the students were able to practice their understanding of rights from an earlier age.
4.8 Challenges the teachers faced implementing rights-based education spanned institutional barriers, strategy and instructional approach appropriation and developing a deeper understanding

A salient theme that has emerged throughout the literature and research study was the variety of challenges teachers face when implementing rights-based education in their classrooms. These challenges pose an imposition to how and if teachers choose to practice rights-based education in their classroom. In turn, it causes barriers to how teachers and students learn the CRC and practice it in their everyday lives.

4.8.1 Institutional challenges which prevent the implementation of CRC

Both participants brought up different challenges they found pertaining to the institutional practices or programming. Jaime spoke to the design of the curriculum documents as a struggle for control:

If [the curriculum is] controlled at a higher level, that means [there is] less control at a lower level… that doesn’t mean [only] the students [are affected but], it also means the teachers are.

Referring to the curriculum documents, Rapoport (2007) found that children’s rights were hardly mentioned in the primary grade expectations. The lack of consideration and curricular guidance may cause a barrier to properly implement authentic strategies. If teachers are not provided proper guidance and support, they may be misinforming their students or creating confusion in their classrooms (Wade, 2004). Mundy et al. (2007) deduced that the quality of elementary education is correlated to the national curriculum standards. The overall lack of consideration for children’s rights education at the national or provincial/territorial level likely contributes to a gap in Canadian children and teachers’ understanding nationwide.
A teacher’s decision to implement children’s rights in their classroom may be influenced by how they view the curriculum document. Jaime described two scenarios where a teacher may see “how broad the curriculum is” or teachers may “feel really confined by the curriculum and objectives we need to work towards.” Additionally, the curriculum is tied to standardized testing in schools, and children’s rights are not a particular focus of standardized teaching. This may cause teachers, as Jamie says, “to sweep it under the rug.” As there is no research around how teachers use the curriculum to implement the CRC, these two juxtapositions provide two rationales to answer that question.

Although Diane had the flexibility to implement the CRC using the IB curriculum, she felt that her class time was an institutional barrier to her implementation. For specialized classes, like Diane’s art class, those teachers are allocated a small period with the students. Diane only sees her class two hours every eight-day cycle. It is difficult for Diane to juggle between teaching the CRC and art in a limited time period. Also, she had to constantly check in with the homeroom teacher to ensure she was not repeating the same material in her own class. She voiced that her main challenge was being more involved in the process of deconstructing the CRC with the students. Due to conflicting schedules, Diane was unable to sit in on the initial brainstorming and inquiry with the students. This finding demonstrates that there needs to be more time planning and learning the CRC to better program for students. Due to the null data on the allocation of school hours and the effects on the implementation of the CRC, this may need to be researched further. These institutional challenges, one being the government and the other being school programming, reveal that the CRC should be integrated thoughtfully in classroom planning, curriculum and standardized testing and be given sufficient time frames for students to inquire and further develop their understanding.
4.8.2 Challenges to teachers’ understanding, comfort levels and implementation

As mentioned in the prior sub theme, there is a lack of focus towards children’s rights in the curriculum. With no clear support or body of resources for recommended use, Jaime predicts “teachers may be overwhelmed with engagement in their class” that they do not have additional information to scaffold their learning further. The research reveals that teacher candidates are not properly instructed to teach children’s rights, which affects their comfort levels and preparedness to face any challenges, which may emerge from teaching a “sensitive subject” (McEvoy 2007, as cited in Swadener et. al. 2013; Emerson and Lundy 2013, as cited in Swadener et. al., 2013). Even though the participants were not formally educated, and did not view themselves as children’s rights educators, they still demonstrated a willingness to teach the CRC. This tension of not being professionally educated and willing to teach is what Jamie says teachers are constantly battling; a tension to engage in sensitive subjects or difficult subjects like the CRC. These participants rationalized it was their professional responsibility to view the curriculum as a guide to their instruction and address the CRC in developmentally appropriate ways that helped their students understand and engage in the topic. However, many teachers do not recognize it as their own professional responsibility to teach the CRC.

4.8.3 Challenges students may face when learning and understanding the CRC

Jaime spoke to the possible challenges children of privilege sometimes face when learning about their rights. He was the only participant that spoke about the rights being its own barrier to learning, “students don’t think of it in terms of a right unless it's something they don’t have access to.” The challenge is finding ways for students to care and empathize with those who have their rights violated. Cassidy et. al (2014) found that young children, in particular, had difficulty learning about violation of children’s rights, if they were not experiencing it
themselves. Truly internalizing and empathizing with others in distant countries requires abstraction and mental flexibility, which young people have yet to understand. Considering their rights are “given” to them this may cause a barrier for them to understand “these gross rights infringements and why they exist” (Jaime.)

Furthermore, teaching children that every child is entitled to their rights being upheld is not a universal guarantee. As Jamie puts it, “students’ rights are afforded in the classrooms that teachers are teaching.” The children Jamie and Diane taught were privileged to have their rights upheld and afford. Jaime discussed the rhetoric behind teaching children’s rights and the universal guarantee. Without the proper instructional strategies, children’s rights education may feel superficial and meaningless if children are not able to inquire and advocate for universal ratification of rights. Jaime was wary about teaching children that “it’s the world we live and there is two dramatic extremes where people’s rights are fully afforded or many rights that are not afforded.” If children understand this idea, when learning the CRC, they may make feel overwhelmed or powerless. What can they do to apply their knowledge and understanding in a meaningful way? There is limited data on what children do know and how they apply their learning of the CRC into everyday life. The challenges Jaime puts forth were barriers he has encountered when trying to engage his students in discussions about current events.

Diane’s challenges, to understanding her students’ learning, were more centralized on the final outcome and responses of the students’ final project. She had never received any feedback or response about the students’ artist statements that accompanied their paintings. She theorized, “People don’t realize the depth of thinking that went into their piece because maybe their sentence structure doesn’t do justice to it.” It was difficult for her to judge if people responded to the students’ written reflection or realized the “depth of understanding” behind their message.


4.8.4 Issues of recreating oppression

The final sub theme to emerge was the pushback to teaching sensitive subjects. Although Jaime did not directly state his experience dealing with the pushback to children’s rights, he spoke to the associated challenges of addressing the violation of children’s rights and the best interest of the child. Jaime believed that teachers “want to design and teach a curriculum that has [the children’s] best interest.” It is up to the teachers’ discretion to teach sensitive subjects like the CRC or human sexuality. Although Jaime exercised his professional judgment and used developmentally appropriate strategies, he was faced with opposition when trying to teach human sexuality to his students. Parents did not want their children learning about that topic in school. Jaime viewed this as a violation of the students’ human rights and their best interest. He rationalized that every “child has the right to know about their body at this stage and [parents] are neglecting that right.” This situation became an issue of recreating oppression and insensitivity because students are not given the proper scientific and factual based information behind their human biology. Jaime conveyed his point through another illustration. He was astounded by the number of teacher candidates that said they first learned about colonialism in his post-graduate class. When teachers do not teach sensitive subjects like children’s rights, human sexuality or colonialism, they are desensitizing and stunting their students’ learning of the real world. The War Child Canada (2004) poll results show that only 10% of youth realize the importance and effectiveness of human rights treaties. This statistic creates a question if Canadian children are being properly educated about world and global issues.

The work done in Diane and Jaime’s class are in effort to educate children to be more globally conscious and understand how they are connected to the globally community. If not, we are just further oppressing them from authentically participating in today’s society and voicing their opinions. Similar to King’s work (2003), if we do not talk about the injustice and
oppression, we are giving it power to reproduce in our societies. In order to have children grow up as politically active and globally conscious citizens, we have to give them the space to practice their rights and advocating for others around the world.

4.9 Conclusion

The data from this study has generated themes that have paralleled or varied from the existing literature on children’s rights education in elementary classrooms. The participants identified key experiences in which shaped their interest and motivation to implementing children’s rights education in their classrooms. Emerson and Lundy (2013) concluded that educational or pedagogical barriers may impede teachers’ implementation of the CRC, but neither of them brought for this anxiety. They capitalized on various resources and colleagues to help further their learning and understanding. Moreover, they were able to articulate their definition of the CRC and disclosed their professional responsibility to teaching children’s rights. They revealed their perceived benefits and outcomes of their students learning, implementing cross-curricular lessons and promoting social behaviours through classroom design. The perceived outcomes of these grade three-six students were homogenous to the results of younger learners in pre-school (Di Santo and Kenneally, 2014) and older students in grade six, eight, twelve (Howe and Covell, 199). The participants were able to integrate the CRC, and other global issues, into cross-curricular expectations and never limited themselves to only the Social Studies curriculum (Rapoport, 2010). One of the teachers highlighted her use of various assessment and evaluation tools to assess their students’ learning. Finally, both participants identified barriers and challenges they have faced throughout their efforts. Their experiences were examples of the institutional, pedagogical and cultural barriers expressed by recent scholars (Wade, 2004;
Rapoport, 2010; Chamberlain, 2010). The following chapter will include the implications and recommendations for the educational community.
CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS

5.0 Introduction

In this final chapter I discuss the implications, recommendations and further research that still needs to be done in this area. First, I provide an overview of my key findings and their significance in light of previous research. Then, I speak to the implications of the findings for the educational community and for myself as a beginning teacher and educational researcher. Next, I put forth recommendations that will help teachers provide meaningful and responsive instruction when implementing rights-based approaches in their classrooms. Finally, I identify areas for further research and end with some concluding comments.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Their Significance

In this research study, I have found that my participants’ experiences and commitment to teaching the CRC have shaped their understanding and responsibility to teach their young students about their rights. In the literature, one of the biggest challenges found was teachers’ competency and comfort level when teaching the CRC. Their limited knowledge and experience were their reasons why they did not choose to implement the CRC (McEvoy, 2007, as cited in Swadener et al. 2013; Emerson and Lundy, 2013, as cited in Swadener et al. 2013). The participants found meaningful ways of implementing rights-based approaches in their classrooms while accessing various resources to enhance their understanding. As educators, they understood that they shape their students’ learning and views of the world. Therefore they have a professional responsibility to plan opportunities for their students to learn the CRC. They utilized a range of resources, implementation approaches and cross-curricular subjects to integrate the CRC into their elementary classrooms. In order to facilitate meaningful discussions and thoughtful inquiry, students had to make a personal connection and understand the factors that
support or oppose the CRC. To prevent disconnect and confusion of the CRC, as stated in the literature, the participants used a variety of diagnostic, formative and summative assessments to ensure students were developing global consciousness and were engaged with the lessons (Chamberlain, 2001; Bromley, 2011, as cited in Cassidy et al. 2014). Diane and Jaime’s observations and insights of perceived benefits shed light to what children know about the CRC and how teachers are providing opportunities to practice social participation in their daily lives. The participants identified challenges and issues that they have faced when implementing rights-based practices in their classrooms, and were unique to those researched by previous scholars (Wade, 2004; McEvoy 2007, as cited in Swadener et al. 2013; Emerson and Lundy 2013, as cited in Swadener et al. 2013). The challenges the participants highlighted were more specific to their own classroom experiences and dynamics. These issues dealt with institutional barriers, challenges to their understanding or students’ understanding and the difficulty with recreating oppression and ignorance in their classrooms.

5.2. Implications

The findings from this research study have broad implications for the education community and narrow considerations for my pedagogy and approaches as a beginning teacher and educational researcher.

5.2.1 Broad Implications: The Educational Research Community

One of the primary purposes of the research study was to discover the experiences a select number of teachers had when implementing rights-based approaches in their classrooms. Their responses and quotes have helped generate broad implications for the educational research community. The results will help influence NGO’s, teachers and students to advocate for the CRC to have a place in elementary classrooms.
Over the years, NGO’s like UNICEF and War Child Canada have conducted many research studies about Canadian children and their understanding of their rights. Rarely in the research is there attention to teachers’ approaches or lessons when implementing the CRC in their classrooms. The findings demonstrate that teachers are implementing the CRC in their classrooms in diverse and methodical ways, and these have implications for teachers more broadly in their own instructional planning in this area. Diane and Jaime did not implement the CRC throughout their whole instructional approach, rather implemented it in varying degrees. Diane had her students focus on it through a lesson, where as Jaime implemented it throughout their weekly meetings and cross-curricular approaches. Jaime and Diane did not disclose using any materials or resources provided by NGO’s like UNICEF or War Child. This demonstrates the need for NGO’s to be developing more material and resource to better support elementary teachers who are eager to implement the CRC in their classroom. Each resource should be designed with a team of educators to foresee how applicable and valuable it will be to support higher learning. There should be a varying degree of complexity and implementation of resources, which would allow teachers to gradually integrate the CRC into their classrooms. In order for teachers and educators to implement the CRC in their classrooms, they must feel comfortable and competent in their ability to deliver and facilitate the discussion. NGO’s could help teachers by supporting them with resources that will help them integrate the CRC into their elementary classrooms.

The participants’ approaches and practices illustrate that any teacher can implement the CRC in their classroom. Neither teacher mentioned being formally educated about the CRC but their experiences travelling abroad and linking the CRC through cross curricular approaches, helped them see teaching about the CRC as their professional responsibility. These teachers found developmentally and age appropriate methods to teach the CRC to the students. Jaime and
Diane found ways to create meaningful opportunities for their students to understand what the CRC means to them, as right holders, and build empathy towards those whose rights are violated. Through knowledge building circles, Jaime was able to build upon students’ input and scaffold their critical thinking skills. Diane used art as a vehicle for students to understand activism and promoting the overall well being for all children. They were also able to assess and evaluate students’ understanding of the CRC. Their use of diverse strategies and methods to implement the CRC reveal the multiple ways of approaching children’s rights in elementary grades.

Teachers have to be flexible in seeing the CRC fit into the curriculum and scaffolding students to understand the CRC. The notion that students are too young to learn social injustice and children’s rights was bravely tested in Diane and Jaime’s classrooms. They found avenues to guide inquiry and build upon prior knowledge.

The findings presented a glimpse into the students’ understanding and comprehension of the CRC. Diane and Jaime’s students were able to understand that CRC was valued differently in different countries or living conditions. Diane’s students communicated through an end of unit art piece, while Jaime’s students had ongoing discussions and weekly meetings. Diane and Jaime’s young students were able to engage in complex conversations about the factors affecting the CRC being upheld in different countries/contexts, what it means to have their rights upheld and how they can advocate for other students. This implication highlights the importance of educating and guiding inquiry of the CRC at an early age. Children are able to understand social injustice if they are scaffolded and prompted appropriately to their developmental level and experience. I even believe that even younger students are capable of learning their rights and can engage in conversations about the complexity of the CRC.
5.2.2 Narrow Implications: My Professional Identity and Practice

The implications of this research have an impact on my own professional identity and practice. After experiencing how children’s rights are violated in a global context, and learning from my participants, I know it is up to me to implement rights based practices in my classroom. Every time I teach or interact with a child that I must demonstrate that I respect and uphold their rights. I will do this by referring back to the CRC and expressing their duty to exercise their rights. If my students are privileged to have their rights upheld, I would like to honour that by always referring back to the CRC. I will model and expect students to exercise their rights and respect the rights of others. Most importantly, I want students’ voice to be heard in the classroom. I want to connect with students daily and have them explain their problems and/or solutions they have. I have a professional responsibility to provide students with an environment that respects their rights and also encourages them to advocate for other children. Students will learn to teach others in their school about the CRC, and advocate for social justice in their community. I will bring in NGO reports on children’s rights and facilitate discussion on the issues children around the world, or in their community face. I must discuss the misconceptions about children’s rights, like the guarantee of rights and the debate on appropriateness of the CRC, so students can have a chance to think critically and reflect on these misconceptions. I will challenge them to speak out about the injustices in their lived lives, school community and cities. I need to connect and collaborate with school administrators and families of my students to ensure that they value children’s rights as much as I do. I need the support from administrators, families and community members, as they are educating students as much as I do. After learning from my participants, I know there are various approaches and methods to assist in the delivery of children’s rights in elementary classrooms ranging from the educator’s knowledge to diverse assessments and unforeseeable challenges. There is no prescribed framework to follow because students come
from varying backgrounds and experiences. In order to have students connect with the CRC, I need to underscore their prior knowledge and participation with children’s rights. The next generation of children’s rights advocates depends on our young students and their knowledge of authentically participating. In accordance to Collins, et al., (2013), I must put my research into my own practice in order to perceive the benefits and results. Therefore, I am committed to implementing rights-based practices in my elementary classrooms because the blend of action and discourse will not only benefits my own development, as well as my students’ development and overall well-being.

5.3 Recommendations

The following are my recommendations based on the findings and implications of this research study. I would hope that these recommendations are put into action in the near future, as Canadian children are disadvantaged when they are not learning about their rights:

- The participants noted that they use the CRC but rarely access any other resources to help them in the classroom. It is important that NGO’s and curriculum developers work with Ontario elementary teachers to create resources and documents that help support the learning and integration of the CRC in classrooms. Classroom teachers know what content is viable and feasible in their classrooms and are able to provide constructive feedback on what is developmentally appropriate for each grade. The resources and documents can be in the form of classroom posters, information packets or professional workshops. The information put forth should vary in difficulty based on developmental level and grade range. There is a wide range of resources out there, but teachers need to know how to access it and the opportunities it will provide their students.
• Based on my findings, most faculties of education do not formally prepare their teacher candidates how to implement the CRC into their classrooms. It is important that Faculties of Education do so, because teacher candidates can create more equitable, pro-social and cooperative learning spaces for their students. In order to have the CRC integrated into more elementary classrooms, teachers and educators must be informed how to do so effectively through classes at Faculties of Education or professional developmental workshops. Professors or guest speakers should be teachers that have previously implemented the CRC into their classrooms so they can speak to their successes and challenges in the classroom.

• School board officials or school administrators should include the CRC in their mission statements or core values and encourage their teachers to implement rights based approaches in their classrooms. They should allocate professional development to help support teachers’ understanding of the CRC and how to implement it within their pedagogy and framework. A key issue raised in my findings was the lack of ongoing professional development for current teachers. Diane had to rely on her colleagues and students to provide her with sufficient information on the CRC in order to remain informed. School administrators should collaborate with teachers who choose to implement rights-based approaches in their classrooms and provide valuable resources and insight on the implementation. In doing this, everyone will remain informed on the progress of implementation and will be able to react appropriately if they face challenges or opposition from parents, families or community members who disagree.

• Classroom teachers should reach out and collaborate with school staff, parents and community members so they can provide insight and feedback on the work done in class.
These important stakeholders can help assist or provide resources for the teachers to use in implementing children’s rights. Their contributions will help to bring perspective and a different voice to the implementation. In doing this, the teacher is able to remain sensitive to the students’ background and prior experience by using their kin and community members as resources. Also it will demonstrate to students that their parents, teachers and school community support their development and understanding of children’s rights.

• Teachers, especially beginning teachers, should try and integrate the CRC into their classrooms from the beginning of the year. In order to provide students with meaningful and responsive opportunities, teachers must integrate the CRC across curricular subjects. The difficulty and depth of the discussions is dependent on the grade level, prior experiences and sensitivity of the students. The following suggestions for Language Arts, Visual Arts and Social Studies and History are based off of the appropriate Ontario curriculum document and learning expectations. During Language Arts, students can make meaningful connections to media texts or read-alouds on children’s rights and communicate their ideas through various forms of language. They can create persuasive speeches, write letters to powerful leaders or reflect on being a global citizen. In Visual Arts, students can create a visual representation or media text of privilege and oppression. Through Social Studies and History, students can inquire and map out countries that have ratified the CRC, countries/areas that are in states of emergency or monitor the development of a vulnerable country in creating safe and protective environments for their children.

• Final and foremost, it is imperative the Canadian Ministries of Education include more explicit attention to the topic of children’s rights and the UNCRC in formal curriculum
documents. This would communicate the significance to teachers, principals, and school partners and further help them realize the importance of working together in meeting this expectation. The Canadian Ministries of Education should begin a proposed plan to mobilize and begin educating citizens on the CRC, specifically in elementary school with Children’s Rights Education. This plan will outline important partners invested in this mobilization and be a source of accountability for their actions.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

The findings from this research study raise three areas for further research and consideration. With teachers being the forefront and facilitators of knowledge, it is imperative that teachers are knowledgeable about the CRC and the appropriate methods of implementing rights-based approaches. Teachers make informed decisions everyday on what to teach their students. Cassidy et al. (2014) found that beginning teachers used the pedagogies and strategies learned in their faculties of education when implementing citizenship education frameworks than the curriculum expectations. Therefore, future research should focus on the role of teacher education in preparing beginning teachers to implement children’s rights in their classrooms. It should be a longitudinal study following new teachers and how they implement Children’s Rights into their classrooms. The length of the study is important, as it has been difficult to track the implementation of the CRE in Canadian classrooms without the framework being modified. Faculties of education play a vital role in shaping beginning teacher’s pedagogy, values and approaches in their classroom. They must provide their teacher candidates with the most up to date resources and information so they feel comfortable and competent in teaching Children’s Rights.
Diane and Jaime’s responses helped shed light to how two elementary teachers implemented rights based approaches in their classrooms. Although they taught grade three to six students about the CRC, hardly were their answers referenced the primary grades (kindergarten – grade 6). Di Santo and Kenneally (2014) focused on pre-school children, and Covell and Howe (1999) focused on later elementary grades, but there is limited research available on Ontario teachers implementing rights based practices with earlier elementary grades (Kindergarten – Grade three). Further research should focus on the rights-based approaches and developmentally appropriate activities done with younger students.

The last area of research is focused on how teachers are creating opportunities for their students to actively participate towards social action in their own communities. Jaime often drew upon his research on social action and youth participation in Haiti, and how that impacted the reconstruction of their society. Future research should highlight how teachers are teaching students about social responsibility and creating opportunities to explore topics of social justice in their community. This hands on inquiry will help them make better connections to the CRC and allow them to practice social participation in their community. The perceived disconnect and dissonance with the CRC could potentially be challenged if children become activists for issues in their communities (Chamberlain, 2001; Bromley, 2011, as cited in Cassidy et al. 2014).

Similar to the positive reflections of the Quebec Student Movement of 2011, the awakening of students’ rights and freedoms transcended to the youth who were able to witness the movement. If children are brought together to create a social and political movement, they could inspire their fellow peers to take action as well (Blanchet-Cohen 2013, as cited in Swadener et al., 2013).
5.5 Concluding Comments

In summation, this research study has revealed that there are many contributing factors in the continued negligence of the CRC in elementary classrooms. This is due to the lack of consideration from the educational community and government in developing responsive actions for children to learn about the CRC in school. This research study has shown that a few teachers have taken the initiative to implement rights-based approaches because they believe it is their professional responsibility to do so. In order to prepare a child-centred learning environment, the practices and approaches should reflect and respect the Convention. The next generation of Children Rights advocates must be raised and educated in elementary classrooms. Elementary teachers play a vital role in facilitating discussion and inquiry about the CRC and allowing children the space to practice their rights. In order to build their global consciousness, children need to learn to advocate for themselves and children around the world. As the world becomes more connected and intertwined, children have to learn to actively participate, be more socially responsible for issues they can change and become involved in the global community. Their participation is needed now, not only when they become legal adults.
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Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Dear ___________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying how primary teachers create opportunities for their students to learn about children’s rights for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 45-60 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher name: Caitlin Cheung

Phone number, email: caitlin.cheung@mail.utoronto.ca
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by _______________________(name of researcher) and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name (printed): __________________________________

Date: ______________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Hello _____, I want to thank you again for agreeing to participate for this research study. The aim of this study is to learn how primary teachers are implementing a rights-based approach in their classrooms. The interview should last approximately 45-60 minutes and I will ask you a series of questions concerning the implementation, authenticity and assessment surrounding rights-based discourses in primary classrooms. I want to remind you that you may choose to skip or not answer any questions I ask. Do you have any questions before I begin?

Section A: Background

1. What grades and subjects do you currently reach and which have you taught in previous years?
2. How many years have you worked as a teacher?
3. Can you describe the school community in which you currently teach? (eg. Number of students, demographics, school focus?)
4. As you know, I am interested in speaking with you today about your experience teaching children’s rights. Before we get to that, can you tell me more about your personal, professional and educational experiences, which contributed to developing your commitment to teaching children’s rights? (Ex. Educational experience, personal experience, volunteer experience, PD, AQ)

Section B: Teacher Beliefs

1. What does the term “children’s rights” mean to you?
2. At what age do you believe children should begin learning about their rights? Why?
3. What roles and responsibilities, do you believe teachers have in terms of preparing children to learn about and understand their rights? Why?
4. How do you see the topic of children’s rights aligning with the Ontario curriculum policy?

5. What do you believe are some of the benefits for children when they have the opportunity to learn about their rights?

Section C: Teacher Practices

1. How do you teach children’s rights? How do you cultivate a rights-based approach in your classrooms?

2. What does a rights-based approach to learning involve? What do you consider when planning your lessons and designing your classroom?

3. What topics have you taught about focusing on children’s rights? Why did you choose those topics specifically?

4. Where did you locate these topics within the curriculum policy?

5. What are some instructional approaches and strategies that you use when teaching?

6. Can you give me an example of a lesson that you conducted on children’s rights?
   a) What grade/subject are you teaching?
   b) What were your learning goals?
   c) What opportunities for learning did you create? Were they co-created?
   d) What outcomes did you observe from your students? How, if at all, did you assess student’s work?
   e) What resources did you use to support their lesson?

Section D: Supports, Challenges and Next Steps

1. What ranges of factors and resources support your teaching about children’s rights?
2. What challenges do you encounter when teaching about children’s rights? How do you respond to these challenges? How might the education system further support you in meeting these challenges?

3. What feedback have you received in regards to your commitment to teaching primary aged children about their rights?

4. What advice, if any, do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to implementing a rights-based approach in their primary classrooms?

Thank you for your time and participation.