

Article

Educational content selection in human rights education at the early childhood education and care level

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Highlights:

- Educational content is not a prioritised discussion when suggesting ideas for observing UN Day.
- Empirical insight into ECEC teachers' ideas on observing UN Day.
- Difficult to work with human rights education without a connection to human rights.
- The four dimensions can offer structures to select content from a subject-didactic perspective.
- Non-governmental and intergovernmental organisations mainly produce educational resources for this level.

Purpose: This study pays attention to educational content in human rights education (HRE) at the early childhood education and care (ECEC) level. It aims to discuss the function of four content selection dimensions for discussing HRE content at the ECEC level.

Design/methodology/approach: The aim is explored through a directed content analysis of 73 online posts suggesting ideas for observing UN Day.

Findings: In the ECEC teachers' ideas, little attention is paid to educational content. Less than half of the posts include a connection to human rights. Preliminary findings indicate that the four dimensions can aid in structuring a subject-didactic approach to HRE content.

Research limitations/implications: This study contributes to discussing HRE content in ECEC. It provides insight into prevalent ideas and discussions; it does not provide insight into how ECEC teachers practice HRE.

Practical implications: The findings are a starting point for discussing support to ECEC teachers in selecting human rights educational content.

Keywords: children's rights, content analysis, human rights education, social studies didactics, theorisation

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Suggested citation:

Rosenberg, Anette R. (2025). Educational content selection in human rights education at the level of early childhood education and care. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 24(2).

<https://doi.org/10.11576/jsse-7813>

 Open access



1 INTRODUCTION

The study of human rights education (HRE) at the early childhood education and care (ECEC) level has increased in recent years, and several scholars have directed didactical questions towards national curricula and educational methods and aims (Brantefors & Quennerstedt, 2016; Hidle, 2021; Phillips, 2016; Quennerstedt, 2019, 2024; Tellgren, 2019). Fewer studies have focused on educational content (Rosenberg, 2022; Sakka & Gouscos, 2023; Tellgren, 2019). Particularly, there is insufficient research-based guidance and theory for ECEC teachers to navigate and choose human rights educational content (Moody et al., 2024; Quennerstedt, 2022; Rosenberg, 2024).

This gap is problematic as education, particularly HRE, is not a politically neutral process (Coysh, 2018; Waldron et al., 2024). Given that the world continues to experience political instability and a rise of right-wing, authoritarian voices (Mallon et al., 2024), which pose challenges to matters of content selection and teacher authority, such as anti-gay curriculum laws, it becomes increasingly important and timely to discuss and develop support for ECEC teachers to navigate and choose human rights educational content for ECEC.

The current study aims to discuss the function of four content selection dimensions for discussing human rights educational content at the ECEC level. The four dimensions combine theoretical perspectives from social studies, didactic, and (socio-)judicial perspectives. Specifically, the paper aims to answer the following question: How could the observance¹ of UN Day be informed by social studies didactic theory and judicial perspectives, and what opportunities and challenges could this bring?

The paper uses the Norwegian ECEC context as an example and draws on empirical data from an online resource developed by the Norwegian ECEC community. Particularly, the data pay attention to the UN Day, an annual commemorative day reflecting the official creation of the United Nations [UN] on 24 October 1945, and thus the start of the international law known as human rights. Observing UN Day is not compulsory but is seen as a longstanding ECEC tradition in Norway (Moen et al., 2021; Winje et al., 2008). It is seen as an occasion to pay attention to children's human rights in an otherwise busy year. Therefore, the observance is valuable for gaining insight into HRE in ECEC.

The paper begins with an introductory section about HRE and the Norwegian ECEC context; it highlights the gap in research about educational content and content selection and presents and analyses human rights educational resources. The following section discusses the four content selection dimensions: *children's age*, *progression*, *human rights knowledge anchored in social studies*, and *children's own interests*. Subsequently, I discuss the applied method of theoretical content analysis and analyse the data with the four dimensions. Finally, I discuss the theoretical and practical value of the dimensions I offer, and prospects for future research and delimitations.

1.1 Human rights education

HRE comprises knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, behaviours and actions for defending and promoting human rights (UN et al., 2006). The UN views HRE as lifelong education, and the

¹ Observing, observance, or any other conjugation of this word refers to the practice of highlighting a special occasion. It does not refer to the scientific method. I use observance in relation to it being the English translation of the Norwegian word *markering* in the English translation of Norway's national ECEC curriculum, the framework plan.

Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005) recommends it begin in the ECEC. Previous research about human rights educational content presents a problematic image of HRE in ECEC. Several studies indicate that HRE in ECEC often does not teach directly about human rights (Brantefors & Quennerstedt, 2016; Tellgren, 2019). Tellgren (2019) argues that ECEC teachers' lack of human rights-related knowledge might be why children receive an HRE without a connection to human rights. Her argument corresponds with Sakka and Gouscos's (2023) small-scale intervention study, which demonstrated that adaptations and knowledgeable adults contribute to developing HRE practices with human rights-related knowledge. The lack of rights in HRE can be detrimental to children's judicial consciousness – the consciousness about human rights, which is necessary for understanding human rights and their role in our lives and for developing legal literacy (Lundy & Martínez Zainz, 2018).

Studies indicate that the curriculum in Norway, Sweden, and Australia provides ECEC teachers with little guidance on content selection (Hidle, 2021; Phillips, 2016; Quennerstedt, 2019). Weak national guidelines can make the presence of HRE dependent on individual ECEC teachers' interests (cf. Lundy, 2012) or leave them to rely on their knowledge base and previous experiences. Although the topic of human rights is a part of ECEC teachers' education, little is known about ECEC teachers' human rights educational knowledge base. A few studies indicate that ECEC student teachers do not feel prepared to work with HRE (Cassidy et al., 2014; Kipperberg, 2018; Long, 2022). This can have consequences for young children's HRE because their knowledge of human rights seems to depend on a teacher's understanding of such rights (Brantefors, 2019; Isenström, 2020).

1.2 Human rights education in social studies

The Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks for Kindergartens (hereinafter: framework plan) requires ECEC to acquaint children with human rights (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). The framework plan views HRE as a cross-curricular matter.² However, it explicitly places the responsibility for teaching the topic of human rights within the learning area *local community and society*. This learning area resembles the school subject of social studies. This subject aims to teach children about various societal conditions and introduce them to the world. In this sense, the learning area is the ECEC's social studies. Thus, HRE in ECEC is placed in social studies, a common subject to educate children on human rights (Jerome et al., 2015). When I use *social studies*, I refer to the learning area of local community and society, except when I specify that I mean the school subject.

The framework plan states that the staff shall “give the children an early insight into the importance of human rights, especially the UNCRC” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p. 57). In doing so, the government set forth the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC; UN, 1989) as the starting point for HRE but provides few specific guidelines regarding what an “early insight” means or the means to realise this directive. Based on topics in the local community and society learning area, HRE can include learning about different human rights, tolerance, pluralism, respecting differences, non-discrimination, equity and equality, institutions and learning about the Indigenous Sami people and national minorities in Norway, different families, traditions and

² Working with HRE in the Ethics, religion and philosophy learning area is also relevant, emphasising human rights ethics, values and freedom of religion (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). However, this is outside the scope of this paper.

lifestyles in a way that sparks their sense of wonder about human rights. In this paper, I am interested in exploring observances of UN Day as one way to provide ECEC children with an early insight into human rights. Therefore, I focus on educational content instead of other didactic questions (cf. Ongstad, 2012).

1.3 Human rights education resources

Although little research-based knowledge exists about HRE in ECEC, human rights educational resources exist; such resources can provide researchers with insight into the field, and ECEC teachers can find support in these resources (Tibbitts & Fritzche, 2006). Table 1 presents an overview of the available resources for working with children at the ECEC level. The table includes resources such as books, movies, pre-produced learning materials or packages developed by actors external to the ECEC or by the ECEC field.

Table 1. Overview of human rights educational resources by non- and intergovernmental organisations for children aged 0–10

Actor	HRE resources for ECEC	HRE resources for school	Fundraising
Save the Children	- The rights' castle - Education about violence and abuse	- The rights' castle - The magical classroom - Education on different human rights-related topics.	Fundraising (ECEC and school) Save the Children-run (school)
SOS Children's Villages	Karsten and Petra's video about children's rights.		- Fundraising (ECEC and school) - Sponsor children (ECEC and school) The school run
Amnesty International		Education on different human rights-related topics.	
Hello World		Educational resources with a variety of topics.	This organisation offers multiple ways for schools to raise money for Hello World (school).
FORUT			- Sponsor children (ECEC and school) - Children's campaign (for ECEC) - The school run/youth campaign.
UNICEF	Children's rights cards	- Children's rights: activity cards - Children's rights cards - Books and movies	The UNICEF-round (ECEC and school)
Plan International		Education on different human rights-related topics.	- Fundraising (ECEC and school) - Sponsor children (ECEC and school)
UN Association of Norway		The UN offers different educational resources on a variety of topics. - FN-Filuren - FN-lecture	
Operation Days Work			Fundraising for schools
Rafto		Offering dialogue-based democracy and HRE.	

Table 2. Overview of human rights educational resources by governmental organisations for children aged 0–10

Actor	HRE resources for ECEC	HRE resources for school	Fundraising
NRK TV-aksjonen (TV-campaign)			Fundraising for the TV-campaign for ECEC and schools
My Voice	Recommends various resources others have created.	Recommends various resources others have created.	
Dembra		Educational resources with a variety of topics on or closely connected to human rights	

Table 3. Overview of human rights educational publishing companies for children aged 0–10

Actor	HRE resources for ECEC	HRE resources for school	Fundraising
Aschehoug	Friends: 10 large books about the UNCRC		
Gyldendal	Educational resources for children's rights and relevant topics.	Educational resources for children's rights and relevant topics.	

Table 4. Overview of human rights educational resources by the ECEC field for children aged 0–10

Actor	HRE resources for ECEC	HRE resources for school	Fundraising
Idebroen.no (Ideabridge)	Ideas and suggestions for integrating the UN Day developed by ECEC teachers.		

The tables are based on searches on several digital sources and recommendations from other researchers. It is not a systematic overview in the sense that it demonstrates a complete list of all available resources. Instead, it is a dynamic and growing list. The tables are separated between ECEC and schools. Although this paper focuses on ECEC, it seems relevant to include resources for schools because HRE in ECEC is part of a larger human rights educational context (see, for example, the Norwegian government's ambitions for progression between ECEC and schools in White paper: Meld. St. 28 [2015-2016; Ministry of Education and Research, 2016]).

The tables further separate the resources produced for HRE and financial purposes. This means I separated the resources for educating children on human rights from those for fundraising. Fundraising used in solidarity projects can have an educational purpose, but as separate resources, they seem to be initiated for reasons other than educational.

Each row displays the resources produced by one actor. Therefore, the far left column names the producer. The two middle columns show the HRE resources for ECEC and schools, and the far right column shows resources explicitly intended for fundraising. Together, the four tables represent an organisational chart. I comment on this below.

Table 1 demonstrates that there exists a variety of HRE resources for the ECEC level, which I divide into three categories:

- a) *Resources developed by NGOs/IGOs.* I previously analysed contributions from NGOs/IGOs (Rosenberg, 2022).

- b) *Resources developed by publishing companies.* Martínez-Bello et al. (2020) have analysed Spanish textbooks for 3–6-year-olds, and Hidle and Rosenberg (2024) have analysed textbooks for 6–8-year-olds.
- c) *Resources developed by the ECEC field.* In this paper, I use the webpage *Idebroen* to find ideas for observing UN Day.

The table further shows that external actors have prioritised schools. None of the governmental actors in this table has produced human rights educational resources for ECEC, and the government and NGOs/IGOs view fundraising as suitable for both educational levels. I will return to category C after presenting and discussing the theory I used in analysing the empirical material.

2 CONTENT SELECTION DIMENSIONS

The Norwegian government's placement of HRE in the learning area local community and society connects it to the corresponding content for the school subject of social studies. Social studies didactic research aims to develop this school subject critically (Lorentzen et al., 1998; Ongstad, 2006). The field concerns itself with all theoretical and practical educational questions researchers or teachers can ask about a subject, such as its content, relevance to society, methods, etc. (cf. Lorentzen et al., 1998). Against this background, HRE in ECEC is, therefore, strongly connected to the research field of social studies didactics.

HRE can include perspectives from both the ethics and social sciences. Therefore, when developing HRE for social studies in ECEC, adapting the HRE approach to both an educational level and to the educational aims of social studies is essential. Below, I combine theoretical perspectives from social studies didactic theory and judicial perspectives, and present and discuss what I perceive to be four dimensions that could inform discussions for selecting content for HRE in ECEC. The four dimensions are *children's ages*, *progression*, *human rights knowledge anchored in social studies*, and *children's own interests*.

2.1 Children's ages

It is necessary to include children's ages to ensure that HRE is adapted to children's educational level. Considerable human rights topics are so complex, severe and scary that it is vital to consider if or when ECEC children should be exposed to specific topics. However, a learner's age is an underdiscussed didactic matter in HRE (Quennerstedt, 2022). The lack of attention to age is a surprising gap considering that children's education shall be directed to "the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential" (UN, 1989.1.[A]). Aligning with a fundamental principle in the Beutelsbach Consensus (Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1976), ECEC teachers must ensure that HRE content does not overwhelm children. The Beutelsbach Consensus constitutes a minimum standard for dealing with normative and controversial issues in civic education in Germany.

Age is about ensuring that educational content is developed for a child's maturity and developmental levels. However, since children's maturity or capacity to understand abstract phenomena can develop faster than their biological age, their present experiences might contribute to evaluating appropriate content. Children's experiences are commonly influenced by age, previous experiences, and various life circumstances. Accounting for a child's maturity is about ensuring that HRE is, under no circumstances, harmful to the child. This actualises protecting

children against overwhelming and scary information and protection against adult responsibility. Howe and Covell (2010) showed that educating children about rights-related responsibilities before rights can lead to severe miseducation. They found that this led to children believing they had to earn human rights and that rights violations resulted from their actions. Consequently, sequence matters in HRE; this actualises the question of progression, which I address next.

2.2 Progression

A view of progression should be included to ensure that children's knowledge and understanding of human rights can develop over time. It is important to include thoughts about progression because it is an under-discussed didactic matter in HRE (Hidle, 2022; Parker, 2018; Quennerstedt, 2022) and the ECEC field (Meland, 2023). In this paper, progression entails reconstructing experiences that contribute to new experiences (Dewey, 1938). In this sense, there must be some continuity, repetition and expansion of children's experiences with human rights. Safeguarding progression concerns preventing arbitrary HRE practices and ensuring that children receive a well-planned education that contributes to children's personal, physical and mental development (UN, 1989, art. 29.1.[A]).

2.3 Human rights knowledge anchored in social studies

Different subjects can have different aims and content for HRE (cf. Louvriot et al., 2019). Therefore, it is significant that what children learn in HRE in a social studies context has a foundation in social studies. For example, HRE in the "ethics, religion and philosophy" learning area emphasises human rights, ethics, values and freedom of religion. In contrast, HRE in the local community and society learning area draws attention to human rights' social, cultural, judicial, and historical aspects (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

There is a need to anchor the human rights knowledge in social studies' goals and the social sciences, to safeguard children's access to knowledge relevant to social studies. The latter is a knowledge domain contributing to the school subject of social studies (T. Christensen, 2015). By the German social studies didactitioner Walter Gagel's (1983) didactic perspective, the social studies curriculum, with help from the social sciences, establishes what is meaningful for children to know about human rights (see also T. Christensen, 2015), as well as children's learning situation, which is embossed by ECEC's and children's local community (Horrigmo, 2014).

To ensure an academic connection to human rights (cf. T. Christensen, 2015), it is vital to develop HRE in a context of social studies to meet the educational aims of social studies. HRE, as defined by the UN (2011), is something other than the topic of human rights in social studies. HRE aims to teach about human rights in a way that prepares children to build a universal culture of human rights. The topic of human rights in social studies is characterised by building and maintaining support for human rights in a way that sparks children's curiosity about these rights (cf. Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). In this sense, the topic has similar social studies ambitions as the school subject of social studies, balancing legitimation and critical thinking (Børhaug & Christophersen, 2012; Børhaug et al., 2017). The UN operates with more normative goals, whereas social studies has more critical ambitions and encourages children to explore and question human rights while pursuing them (cf. Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

A pluralism of perspectives should be included to further safeguard children from one-dimensional thinking and foster curiosity about human rights. Being able to think independently and freely express and orient oneself in a world filled with influences is a foundational freedom, according to CRC Articles 13 and 14 (UN, 1989). Therefore, children must have access to knowledge that enables such critical thinking, such as knowledge that seeks to develop respect for other cultures, tolerance and peaceful interactions and friendships across ethnic, national or religious groups (UN, 1989.1.[C-D]) This aligns with a fundamental principle in the Beutelsbach Consensus (Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1976) which states that what is considered controversial in society, research and subjects must be presented as controversial. The human rights are scientifically, politically and judicially disputed (cf. Gloppen, 2018). Consequently, human rights entitlements, issues and violations look different depending on the context in which they occur. However, several studies show that human rights violations or issues are often presented to school- and ECEC children as absolute or unambiguous, often occurring in foreign countries (Y. Bakken, 2015; Brantefors, 2019; Hahn, 2020; Rosenberg, 2022; Vesterdal, 2019; Waldron & Oberman, 2016). By applying the Beutelsbach Consensus principle, social studies can foster children's curiosity about human rights while encouraging them to engage critically. This dimension grounds HRE academically and promotes curiosity towards human rights.

2.4 Children's own interests

To safeguard that HRE has value for children's lives, children's own interests should be included. The perspective on children's own interests in this paper differs from a sociological perspective of children's interests (see, for example, Freeman, 2012). A sociological view of children's interests takes children's lived experiences as a point of departure for discussions about children's human rights, called children's lived rights (Harcourt & Hägglund, 2013; Karlsson, 2021). Instead, I apply Walter Gagel's (1983) didactical perspective to ensure an academic anchoring to children's own interests. Selecting meaningful content for children's lives is at the core of Gagel's theory. Following his perspectives, one should choose content that provides children with the knowledge and skills needed to act and make decisions in various situations (Tønnessen & Tønnessen, 2007). This places children's own interests at the forefront of content selection, with prospects for both children's present and future societal lives.

Such a position of children draws on a view of children as active citizens who, through social studies, shall gain competencies they can use as citizens, both presently and in the future (Horrigmo, 2014). Such a view is also tied to a significant judicial premise in the CRC that children are active, interdependent individuals with rights and freedoms they can use to attend to their own interests and increasingly become more independent of adults as they mature. Safeguarding children's own interests adheres to the idea of providing children with the knowledge and skills necessary to develop an understanding of human rights that involves objective and critical elements.

According to Lundy and Martínez Zainz (2018), being able to look after one's own rights and freedoms is a critical component of HRE and is invaluable in developing children's judicial consciousness. Therefore, it is within children's own interests to learn about their rights (UN, 1989, art. 42 and 29.1.[B] in the CRC). Aligning with a fundamental principle in the Beutelsbach Consensus (Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1976), the legal knowledge children have access to must be authentic to their lived contexts (S. Christensen & Grammes, 2020).

Children's various life circumstances indicate that some rights are more important than others for them to know how to safeguard their own interests. For example, children who are members of vulnerable groups, such as children with refugee status (UN, 1989, art. 22 of the CRC), disabilities (art.23) or with a minority or Indigenous background (art. 30). It is possible to select rights that are in all children's own interests in combination with rights that are actualised by some children's particular situations. However, this is not an easy task as it is difficult to see the CRC as universal and at the same time applicable to the individual child. It is necessary to explore this matter further.

3 METHOD

The data material consists of ideas for observing the UN Day published as posts on the webpage Idebroen (Idea Bridge). Idebroen is a resource developed for the ECEC field to share ideas on different topics (see Table 1). Since UN Day marks the official creation of the UN with its successive international human rights framework, observing this day can be seen as one way to practice HRE. Still, it is the ideas for working with HRE that this data material provides insight into; these posts provide little valid expression about practical work with HRE. In this paper, Idebroen is a place that can express discussions relevant to the concerns of the ECEC field.

A search using the keywords *rettigheter* (rights) and *FN dagen* (UN Day) yielded 89 multimodal posts. The latter keyword yielded 79 posts, and the former 10 posts. Of those 10 posts, six also contained the keyword *FN dagen*. Each of the remaining 83 posts was browsed to identify how the ECEC staff had observed UN Day. Ten posts included little information about UN Day and were excluded. In total, I analysed 73 posts.

Since this paper questions social studies didactic theory and judicial perspectives' function in discussing human rights educational content at the ECEC level, I applied a directed or theoretical content analysis (J. Bakken & Andersson-Bakken, 2021; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The posts' images, headings and body texts comprise the unit of analysis, and in sum, they offered insight into the idea's educational content. Inductively, I found three main approaches to the educational content: human rights, diversity and fundraising. When these had been identified, they were then analysed with the analytical question: *In which ways could these ideas have been different if they were informed by the four dimensions: children's ages, progression, human rights knowledge anchored in social studies, and children's own interests?*

The analytical question examines how the specific dimensions could shape content selection in HRE at the ECEC level. It contributes to addressing the research question by offering a structured lens for understanding how social studies didactic theory and judicial perspectives might inform the observance of UN Day, identifying both opportunities and challenges for integrating these dimensions into HRE.

3.1 Ethics

Given the paper's theoretical nature, I have no ethical considerations to declare involving research participants. I have consulted with the guidelines from the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH, 2022) and the EECERA Ethical Code for Early Childhood Researchers (Bertram et al., 2015). I find that the research reported in this paper conforms to these guidelines. Particularly as the paper pays due regard to the CRC, promotes

democratic values and provides an original research contribution while building on the work of others (Bertram et al., 2015, see 2.2, 3.1 and 4.1; NESH, 2022, A.8).

Using Idebroen as a source of empirical insight has its ethical limitations. The post comprises a headline, body text, images, keywords and its creator's name. However, it is up to the individual creator how much they share. Therefore, some posts contain more details in terms of text and pictures than others.

All the posts included described what occurred on the day of observance or what they did to prepare for the observance. However, few didactic discussions about the chosen observance approach are included in the posts, making it difficult to understand why something was chosen. Lack of didactic discussions actualises the need for other investigations into HRE in ECEC to gain a full understanding.

While Idebroen has approximately 85,000 members, the numbers say little about how many use this webpage for inspiration and who in the ECEC field uses and posts on the webpage. The creator's educational background could impact the post's content because an ECEC teacher has more academic training in (subject) didactic planning and evaluation than a childcare and youth worker. While I assume it is mainly ECEC teachers who post and use this webpage as inspiration because of their main responsibility to plan, carry out and evaluate the unit's content (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017), it is impossible to make any conclusions. However, I am interested in these ideas as expressions of what the ECEC field perceives to be relevant and appropriate human rights educational content. For that purpose, this webpage is reliable. While the webpage lacks date stamps indicating when the posts were published, some included references to Norway's COVID-19 pandemic, indicating publication after 2020. The posts showing the use of FORUT materials refer to activities which were a part of the organisation's 2017, 2018 and 2022 campaigns. These references indicate recent publications.

4 FINDINGS

The data material indicates that the ideas for observing UN Day are planned and adapted to the individual child group since the activities extend from one week to a month. The data material further indicates that they include cross-curricular teaching, which the framework plan recommends (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). The ideas include various forms of actualisation and concretisation of the abstract concept of the UN and related matters, as well as recommendations for using resources produced by NGOs/IGOs. To some extent, human rights-related knowledge, values and actions were visible (UN et al., 2006). Together, the ideas demonstrate that it is common to approach observances of UN Day with a focus on human rights, diversity or fundraising, either separately or in some combination (see Table 2).

Table 5. Overview of approaches to observing the UN Day

Approaches	Amount
Diversity + fundraising	24
Human rights	17
Diversity	11
Human rights + diversity	10
Fundraising	9
Human rights + fundraising	2

When an idea focused on human rights, it paid attention to human rights values, children's rights, and the UN. If it focused on diversity, it drew attention to the diversity within the child group or different cultures and countries outside the ECEC. If it focused on fundraising, ECEC teachers, parents, and children raised money for either a specific national or international organisation or a child that the ECEC sponsored. It is unclear whether the money went to the local offices of the national organisations or the organisation in general. As noted in section 3.1, I do not consider fundraising as a human rights educational resource. Still, I have included fundraising as an empirical approach because the ECEC teacher's ideas, as posted on the webpage, demonstrated that it is used as an approach to observing the UN Day.

4.1 Children's ages: Creativity and time open for age-adaptations

The ideas indicate that ECEC teachers adapt the observance of UN Day in various ways: for example, arts and crafts projects, baking and cooking, spending several weeks preparing for the Day, or integrating it in a month-long project; they also used what was familiar to children, such as the diversity within a child group, or they included children's families in their activities. These adaptations occurred in all three approaches.

Figure 1 illustrates one of these adaptations, exemplified here by the fundraising approach and a FORUT material. FORUT (n.d.), an NGO, offers an annual package that focuses on a new country, children, and animals. It aims to raise money for the organisation's work in that country. The making of elephants has been adapted to the children's ages and developmental levels through different arts and crafts techniques.

Figure 1. The elephants



The left image illustrates elephants made by 4–5-year-olds, and the right image illustrates elephants made by 1–2-year-olds.

Others actualised and concretised the UN Day by drawing attention to children's personal interests in establishing friendships; this became evident in one of the headlines: *Hardcore friends. For the "friendship day", our children hand-painted stones and made trolls*. Others chose to pay attention to children helping other children, which was visible in one of the posts' headlines: *Our sponsored*

child's UN Day. Children helping other children can be understood as training in human rights-relevant actions, as illustrated in Figure 2. These actualisations and concretisations could have been motivated by children's interest in other children.

Figure 2. Items for sale



From the left: Children made clowns, with the proceeds going to the Hospital Clowns; children's various art projects were for sale, with the proceeds going to the TV campaign; and second-hand clothes were collected to sell, with the proceeds going to Save the Children.

The ideas demonstrate an effort to actualise UN Day or human rights and make such topics tangible for ECEC children. However, safeguarding the idea of adapting the content to children's educational levels requires that the approach is designed with their developmental levels in mind. While the fundraising approach, as exemplified by Figures 1–2, demonstrates that NGOs/IGOs are service providers for HRE in ECEC (see Table 1), such an approach might be unsuitable for young children as it risks imposing adult responsibilities on them (Brantefors, 2019; Dunhill, 2019; Howe & Covell, 2010). For example, framing UN Day around solidarity could involve other types of activities such as doing something kind for the local community, storytelling or role-play that emphasises empathy, community, and understanding of how human rights are relevant in our everyday lives without requiring children to engage in financial fundraising. Additionally, ensuring that the UN Day is inclusive of all children, rather than focusing on a particular child or action, it essential to ensure that HRE reaches its educational goals (UN, 1989, 2011) and avoids reproducing harmful us-and-them barriers (Brantefors, 2019; Okafor & Agbakwa, 2001; Rosenberg, 2022).

Less than half of the 73 ideas focused on human rights, which offers little empirical insight into how ECEC teachers adapt human rights content to young children. However, there is some indication that the ECEC teachers utilised time as a tool for adaptation by having a project about a particular right from the CRC and combining the topic of human rights with a creative activity (see Figure 8). Others chose to actualise the rights to something with which children could identify by using a book already contextualised to ECEC (see Table 3 for the book series *Friends* or Figure 9 for a book about bedrooms). Ensuring young children can learn about human rights through creative

activities (Sakka & Gouscos, 2023) or with examples they can identify (Tvärråna, 2018) could make abstract phenomena, such as human rights, more tangible.

4.2 Progression: Gradual development of human rights-related knowledge does not need a linear progression trajectory

Regarding reconstructing experiences that contribute to new experiences (progression), the ideas indicate that this could be done in several ways; it is important to note that the posts did not include explicit thoughts about progression. First, Figure 1, which illustrates adaptations to different age groups, also shows that there can be progression in arts and crafts experiences. Second, several of the ideas suggested the use of FORUT, which includes new elements yearly. If ECEC teachers use FORUT materials annually, then children can experience progression in terms of which country or animal they learn about through these materials (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Example of progression in learning about different countries



The left image shows elephants from Sri Lanka, and the right image shows Yetis from Nepal.

When seen together, the posts indicate that ideas for observing UN Day have the same or similar content and approach regardless of children's ages. This became evident as the ideas suggested that learning about rights, values, the UN, different countries and cultures, and solidarity is suitable for children aged one to five. Experiencing the same content over five years of age creates continuity, meaning repetition without expansion (cf. Hidle, 2022).

However, children's gradual development of human rights-related knowledge does not need a linear progression trajectory. If the UN Day is well planned and includes "deep" initial education with subject-specific elements (Hidle & Helgesen, 2024), children may learn new elements yearly. Thus, progression can occur regarding which human rights children learn about, which symbols they come to know, what they make, projects they work on, stories they hear or watch and countries or cultures they learn about. For example, a family gathering with the youngest ECEC children could develop into activities for older children that focus on children's rights in connection with their families and perhaps create connections to previous gatherings.

4.3 Human rights knowledge anchored in social studies: Little focus on children's human rights and more focus on values does not necessarily safeguard children's own interests

Twenty-nine posts referred to human rights. However, only three posts referred to specific human rights articles or what children were entitled to (see Figures 8-10). One post showed that children had listed what was important to have, regardless of the context (Figure 4). The list includes social studies elements such as 'needs' related to family or human rights. It shows that those children had some

conceptions of what they were entitled to from a rights perspective. Some of the posts also suggested working with the UN as a topic by displaying UN symbols such as the peace dove, the UN flag or the logo (see Figure 6). As the founding institution of what we know as human rights and a societal institution, it is a relevant matter to address for the topic of human rights in social studies. Others included pre-prepared learning materials from NGOs and IGOs (see Figure 5). These learning materials draw attention to children's rights; I have discussed them elsewhere (see Rosenberg, 2022).

Figure 4. A poster made by ECEC children



It lists the following as important aspects all children need regardless of where they live: 'Food, toys, water, a place to live, clothes and shoes, play, to be inside and outside, oxygen, taking care of the earth, moving the body, nice adults, a bed with pillow and duvet, friends, mother and father, a big brother, playing games, being warm and not freezing, light and not saying bad things to each other'.

Figure 5. UNICEF's Children's Rights Card and posters from Save the Children's Rights Castle



The left and middle images depict UNICEF's Children's Rights Cards, some cards show art. 2 about non-discrimination, art. 28 the right to education, and art. 22 rights for refugee children. The right-sided image shows posters from Save the Children's Rights Castle (see Table 1).

However, most posts included text excerpts such as *We worked with children's rights* and *We worked with children's rights in the two weeks leading up to the day*.³ There were no instances where such text referenced specific human rights; this indicates that ECEC teachers might be concerned with describing elements of UN Day on this webpage other than the specific educational content. The posts indicate that the ideas focused more on the values underpinning human rights than the specific human rights (see Figure 7); this became evident when several posts described values such as equality, equity and friendship without reference to a specific human right. The little attention to human rights in these observations could have troublesome implications for developing young children's judicial consciousness (Lundy & Martínez Zainz, 2018).

While HRE includes both knowledge and values aspects, these matters belong to two respective learning areas in a Norwegian ECEC context: the learning area of ethics, religion and philosophy and the learning area of local community and society. There is a chance that the division of labour between these two educational perspectives might seem less strict in the practical work. However, it is important for the realisation of HRE that one aspect is not prioritised at the expense of the other (UN, 2011).

Figure 6. A collage about the UN



The collage exemplifies the different ways the posts expressed work about the UN organisation, such as the peace dove, FN-Filuren (a character that teaches young children about the UN organisation), the UN flag or their logo.

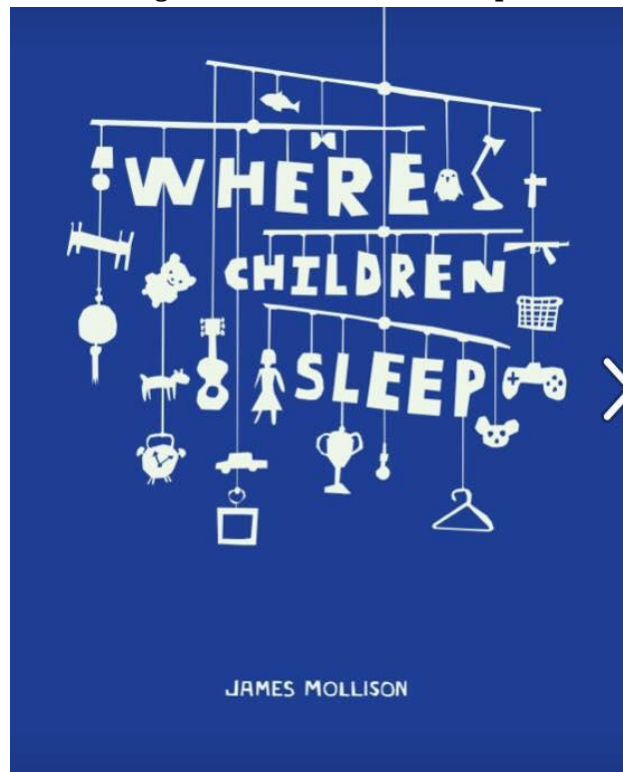
³ These text excerpts are examples of what authors wrote in the posts that lacked a detailed description of what right(s) they had included. It is not an exact quotation since I aim to exemplify the message of several posts.

Figure 7. A collage about values

The collage illustrates the presence of values such as equality, equity, and community symbolised by children's handprints, earth, rainbow, and text: 'We all fit together and there is room for more.' (bottom left image) and 'Together we have equal value.' (top left and bottom right images).

Figure 8. The right to clean water

The top blue square says all children have the right to clean water. The bottom bold text refers to the framework plan directive for familiarising children with their rights. An ECEC teacher wrote in the post's body text: 'We observed UN Day this week and focused on the right to water. We arranged an outdoor movie theatre. The children have filmed and edited the movie [about water].'

Figure 9. Where Children Sleep

Another example is an ECEC teacher who read the book *Where Children Sleep* by James Mollison and had children take pictures of their bedrooms. They later discussed the right to education, work, health, security, family, rest and food based on the book and the pictures.

Figure 10. A post about children's needs

“All children need a safe place to live, with care, food, healthcare, and activities.”

Another significant factor in grounding the ideas in a social studies perspective is to include a pluralism of perspectives. The posts demonstrate that offering children nuanced content occurred in the diversity approach (a third of the posts) in the sense of presenting various cultures. Here, ideas are centred on cultural diversity within a child group or outside ECEC. The suggestions of gathering children's families (see Figure 11) or creating installations with different clothing, toys, food, and languages demonstrate opportunities for nuanced content about cultural diversity (see Figure 12). Including toys in the installations offers a different view of diversity than human features, which many ECEC teachers tend to focus on (see, for example, Sadownik, 2020). Although there were no references to diversity-related rights, observing UN Day in these ways could be an opportunity to provide experiential knowledge about various aspects of diversity.

Figure 11. Posts about approaching UN Day with a focus on diversity



Several posts exemplifying approaching UN Day with families, languages, foods and flags.

Figure 12. A collage with installations

A collage illustrating installations of different toys, flags and costumes to include a pluralism of perspectives.

Introducing children to various cultures, languages, or foods can convey content that positively contributes to appreciating the elements that make humanity diverse and normalise diversity. It can also contribute to the opposite if done non-respectfully and unconsciously without rights-conscious teachers (Rosenberg, 2020), since HRE must include rights-respecting teachers and surroundings (Isenström & Quennerstedt, 2020; Moody et al., 2024). By grounding the content selection in a social studies perspective, children could engage with human rights in a way that fosters curiosity and understanding.

The posts indicate a varying presence of safeguarding children's own interests. The posts anchoring the content to specific human rights articles seem to have a higher inclusion of children's own interests than those with little connection. It is within children's own interests to know that they have the right to the highest attainable standard of health (see Figures 8-10), the right to an education, rest, security and being taken care of (see Figure 9), and the right to non-discrimination (see Figure 5). Also, it is interesting for them to know that human rights aim to protect human diversity (UNESCO, 2001). However, it varied whether an idea focused on one or several rights and how well they were connected to the CRC, meaning that not all rights seem to have precision and a legal anchoring.

Safeguarding children's own interests by ensuring that the content is selected with their best interests in mind allows for an educational prioritisation of the child and what is meaningful for children in their current context (cf. Gagel, 1983). One way to do this is to choose content that is precise and has legal anchoring in the CRC; this can provide opportunities for children to start being able to look after their own rights and freedoms and gradually become more and more independent (Lundy & Martínez Zainz, 2018). Ensuring children's own interests could also contribute to

evaluating NGO/IGO services in the ECEC (see Figure 5 for example), as these are not always adapted to children's own interests but the organisation's interests (Coysh, 2017; Rosenberg, 2022).

5 DISCUSSION

The analyses have shown that applying the four content selection dimensions to these ideas can break down the ideas' educational content components into smaller pieces, thereby structuring subject-didactic thinking about human rights educational content. As ECEC teachers are obligated to provide children with early insight into human rights, and content selection in HRE is intricate and demands a deliberate and knowledgeable approach (Rosenberg, 2020), these dimensions can offer support in this matter.

The analysis has exposed possibilities and troublesome challenges for realising HRE in Norway. The first possibility relates to *progression*, a crucial element for developing children's judicial consciousness. Since the ECEC teachers did not discuss progression in these posts, and given the fact that it is a new topic in the Norwegian ECEC field (Meland, 2023) as well as in HRE (Hidle, 2022; Parker, 2018; Quennerstedt, 2022), the paper shows that accounting for progression when selecting content can facilitate further discussions for different progression-trajectory paths and when children should learn about different types of rights, issues, and violations. As well as to start discussing what subject-specific elements could entail for this educational level, thus resulting in knowledge about "deep" initial education in HRE (Hidle & Helgesen, 2024).

The second possibility relates to *children's own interests*. Selecting content that enables children to understand and look after their rights raises questions about what motivates ECEC teachers' collaborations with NGOs/IGOs and how well such collaborations can safeguard children's own interests. Over half of the posts were tied to NGOs/IGOs, and it seems that the posts focused more on showing the collaboration rather than critically discussing the educational content and who benefited from it. Furthermore, several posts did not contain explicit connections to human rights. For example, the fundraising for the hospital clowns could have included experiences with the right to receive the highest attainable standard of health (art. 24); such an inclusion would have been in accordance with the dimension of *children's own interests* and *human rights knowledge anchored in social studies*. The absence does, however, demonstrate several missed opportunities for engaging in discussions about educational content and teaching children about their rights. The *children's own interests* dimension could offer necessary reminders to select content that is meaningful for children's lives.

The first challenge these dimensions expose is ensuring the content is appropriate for this educational level. The findings demonstrate that most posts suggested adapting arts and craft techniques to children's age and abilities; such adaptations raise concerns about ECEC teachers' abilities and experiences with adapting human rights articles and issues to young children. Adapting human rights content to this level is a familiar challenge in Swedish ECEC (see Tellgren, 2019), as it relates to the challenge of including human rights educational content in HRE.

Based on this paper's findings, it does not seem important for the ECEC field to discuss educational content on the investigated webpage. If ECEC teachers do not concern themselves with such matters when sharing educational ideas with each other, it is possible to question whether and to what degree they discuss educational content in their physical conversations and planning (see, for example, Tellgren, 2019). From the perspective of Gagel's (1983) theory, it is essential for children's future and present societal participation that their HRE includes educational content (see

also Horrigo, 2014). The lack of hits on the keyword “rights” suggests several issues for HRE. First, ECEC teachers might lack the necessary knowledge to connect UN Day with human rights. Second, ECEC teachers might not prioritise a focus on rights in their discussions or take it for granted when suggesting an idea. However, the data showed that 29 of 73 posts suggested working with human rights, but only three posts specified which rights they had focused on; this indicates a willingness to arrange activities to familiarise children with their rights, which correlates with previous studies (Brantefors & Quennerstedt, 2016; Tellgren, 2019).

At the same time, it is concerning that the posts that included explicit connections to human rights sometimes lacked precision and legal anchoring. If, as the analysis showed, the topic of human rights mainly concerns values or focuses on rights without a proper connection to human rights, it can lose sight of developing children’s knowledge of human rights. It is crucial for children’s judicial consciousness to develop that what they learn as their rights is grounded in the CRC or other conventions (Lundy & Martínez Zainz, 2018). Therefore, including the dimension of children’s own interests could contribute to ensuring a proper connection to the CRC, and the dimension of human rights knowledge anchored in social studies could contribute to differentiating between what could be understood as a value or a social studies perspective in HRE.

Given that less than half of the posts contained a proper connection to human rights and the lack of hits on the keyword *rights*, it is appropriate to question whether observing UN Day in this manner can be viewed as HRE.

The little attention to educational content does not mean they do not work with educational content when planning to observe UN Day. However, since I have not seen ECEC teachers discuss human rights educational content in other places, it raises questions about whether they do not consider this to be an important topic to discuss and why. If discussing this is considered unimportant or taken for granted, it can have implications for realising social studies’ ambitions of encouraging children to be curious about human rights while pursuing them (cf. Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

An implication is that human rights are portrayed as something neutral. Since it is a normative topic and the rise in political instability and right-winged authorities, educational content can open an indoctrinating path if not met with other perspectives (S. Christensen & Grammes, 2020; Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1976). An indoctrinating path could hinder the emerging discourse that HRE should include a critical perspective (Tibbitts, 2018) and enable understanding, tolerance, and curiosity towards other cultures and people that are different from ourselves (UN, 1989, 29.1.[C-D]). Ensuring that HRE includes a pluralism of perspectives could be one way to include critical perspectives at this educational level. However, further research is necessary to fully conceptualise what critical perspectives entail at this level.

6 CLOSING REMARKS

This study has shown that social studies didactic theory and judicial perspectives have a function in discussing human rights educational content in the sense of offering a structured way of thinking about HRE in a subject-specific context. Teachers have an invaluable role in realising HRE in the formal education system and need different kinds of support to realise this obligation. Therefore, it is necessary to continue developing the didactics for HRE and guiding documents for HRE at this level. This contribution is one small step in such a development process by offering support for thinking critically about the educational content, considering what perspectives are taken and who

benefits from the content. Such a contribution is helpful for ECEC and schoolteachers who work with HRE.

The study's theorising and data material barely scratch the surface of HRE in ECEC. It can only engage in HRE discussions on an idea-level and indicate which discussions the ECEC teachers engage in (Goodlad et al., 1979). Therefore, further research with other types of empirical data is necessary to gain a clearer and more precise notion of HRE in ECEC.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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