Pioneers of Change?
Practising Children's Rights at School

- A Qualitative Double Case Study -

Master Thesis

Milena Madeleine Lauer [S4835387]

1st Assessors: Dr. Piet van der Ploeg & Dr. Lourens van Haaften

2nd Assessor: Dr. Sanne te Meerman

MSc Ethics of Education

Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences

University of Groningen

08/2022   [13904 words]

Pioneers of Change?

Practising Children's Rights at school

– A Qualitative Double Case Study –

Thirty years ago, Germany ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was proposed in 1989. It has various implications for the educational practice because it is built on a new understanding of children and childhood. However, the children's rights are not yet a lived natural practice at most schools in Germany, and when implementing them, inherent tensions of the children's rights convention become visible.

In a double case study, two German schools that aim to put the child's rights into practice have been analysed and compared to answer the research question: *"How are the children's rights Articles 3, 12, 29 and 31 practised at a "Children's Rights School" and a "Democratic School" in Germany, and how do the practices differ?"* Therefore, interviews and focus groups have been conducted, and the data has been analysed in a qualitative content analysis.

Based on four exemplary children's rights that were chosen because of the inherent tensions between them, it was shown which motivations there are for implementing children's rights at school, where the difficulties lay and what specific concepts were developed for the four individual rights. It was also shown that there are many occurring tensions that come with that transposition of Children's Rights in the school context that should not be neglected. And while there are specific challenges and advantages for both types of schools, it became clear that there are opportunities to implement children's rights in private and state schools and that both schools could be pioneers of change.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction and theoretical exploration

1.1. Introduction

Recent studies show that despite the implications of the Children's Rights Convention (CRC), the educational practice in Germany insufficiently addresses the child's rights (e.g., National Coalition Deutschland, 2019). The main reason for this could be that some children's rights (CR) articles contradict each other, and there is no guidance on how to balance them. Two exemplary tensions between rights will be taken as the basis for this thesis: (1) The "In the Best Interest" principle versus the "Right to be heard" and (2) the "UN Goal of Education" versus the "Right to Rest, Leisure and Play".

This thesis is a practical study aiming at gaining insight into the implementation of children's rights in educational practice. What motivates schools to implement children's rights as a priority? Where are the difficulties in the process of implementing these rights? Where do difficulties arise in translating the children's rights articles into everyday practice? And how do the tensions in the Convention affect this process?

To answer these questions, two schools were chosen for a case study: a UNICEF-certified Children's Rights School and a Free Democratic school. Both schools have the objective of putting the child's rights into practice and have a very explicit and distinct way of doing so. Additionally, since one school is a regular public primary school and the other is a private free school, it will be interesting to see how these structural differences play out in practice.

The research aims to describe the practices at these two schools, compare them and then identify possible tensions in the CR and educational discourse. Therefore, the thesis is structured as follows. First, the Children's Rights Convention (CRC) and its implications for educational practices will be described. After briefly describing the current status of CR implementation in Germany, the two exemplary inherent tensions in the CRC are named and explained. Following the research questions and methodology, the results will be presented with an emphasis on describing the practices at the two schools. Then, some identified tensions in the data will be critically evaluated. Finally, the results will be discussed, and a conclusion drawn.

1.2. Children's Rights Convention

To set a common ground for this research, this chapter explains the background and legal status of the CRC.

The "Convention on the Rights of the Child" (CRC) is an international treaty adopted by the United Nations (UN) on the 20th of November 1989. The background of this treaty is a paradigm shift in thinking about children (individuals until 18) and childhood. Children are no longer considered adults in the making but are seen as different from but equal to adults. Children need special protection, provision, and child-friendly participation. But they also have an interest in freedom and participation. In this balance between equality (seeing children as equal beings from the start) and the differences (children as developing and evolving beings) lay the challenges for adults in interactions with children (Maywald, 2011). The UN recognised these differences and therefore saw a necessity to translate the human rights declaration into a convention that gives children these rights while valuing the special status of childhood (Edelstein et al., 2019). In 53 articles, the child's rights are formulated to ensure children's protection, provision, and participation.

Germany ratified the Convention thirty years ago, in 1992. According to Article 4 of the CRC (1989), Germany is obligated to implement the provisions of the Convention into national law and must ensure that principles and regulations are effectively enforced. As of today, it serves as a simple federal law and is not yet a part of the constitution and, hence, is subordinate to it (Maywald, 2021).

The CRC, with its new understanding of childhood and the status of children, does not only come with legal consequences but also with a series of implications for educational practice and policy making. Some of these implications will be explained in the following subchapter.

1.3. Children's Rights and Educational Policies

Since the CR demand a new way of dealing with children and a new understanding of what it means to be a child, the convention has implications for the educational practice, ideologically and legally. In order to understand the comprehensive influences of the CRC on educational practice, this chapter summarises the primary themes and implications of the convention.

When looking at the 53 different articles, four major themes emerge: Treating the children equally in a non-discriminatory setting, protection and safety from violence, the individual provision of the child's potential and age-appropriate participation. Due to these themes, the educational practices and policies need to be reassessed and remodelled. Numerous specific aspects fall under each theme (Student, 2019). In the following, a few possible examples are presented.

To treat all children equally in a non-discriminatory setting, the inclusion of all children regardless of socio-cultural background, disability or particular educational needs is implied, as well as social and fair manners in the classroom. In case of protection and safety from violence, non-violent teaching, communication and conflict resolution or structures to help students who are unsafe in their home or community should be implemented at school. Regarding individual provision, students should have a wide range of learning opportunities and access to creative and cultural activities and movement and play areas. In the case of special educational needs, adequate support needs to be ensured. Lastly, in terms of participation, students should have ample opportunities for co-determination at the place of learning and sufficient opportunities and to help develop, express, and present their views and opinions.

Finally, the UN formulated a goal for education in the convention, which, consequently, impacts the educational policies:

> *"States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to: a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations; c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilisations different from his or her own; d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin; e) The development of respect for the natural environment"* (Convention on the rights of the child,1989, Article 29).

This goal provides another layer of meaning to the aim of schooling by taking personal development and preparation for life in a free society into account, as well as teaching respect for others, specific values, and the environment.

These implications the CRC has for educational practice are, as the following subchapter will show, not yet incorporated in all German schools.

1.4. Current Situation

This chapter will show the societal and academic relevance of researching in this field between educational practice and children's rights by looking at the current status of CR implementation in Germany, showing why further research, such as this thesis, is needed at the interface of CR and education.

Even though the CRC has been ratified for 30 years, the everyday practice does not necessarily sufficiently conform to all rights. Therefore, the implementation of CR is monitored regularly. Apart from the official national report that must be presented to the "Committee on the Rights of the Child" every five years, other instances monitor the implementation independently. The most prominent German organization that does this is the "National Coalition Germany" (NCG), an association of 101 individual organizations that comments and adds to the national report every five years. Among them are "UNICEF Germany", the "German Children's Fund", and "Save the Children", as well as many educational organizations. Due to the scope of this report and the contribution of over 100 different organizations, their last report of 2019 serves as the source to describe current drawbacks and recommendations for implementing CR in Germany.

In general, when related to the school context, the NCG concludes that the CR are increasingly being treated in the curriculum. However, schools' structures and working methods and the overall school reality do not sufficiently meet the requirements of the CRC. According to the 2018 Children's Report, around 84 per cent of the 1,000 children and young people surveyed (10-17 years old) have heard little or nothing about CR (National Coalition Deutschland, 2019). This shows that neither the knowledge nor the practices at schools in the matter of CR are satisfactory.

Due to the various implications of CR for educational practice and the scope restrictions of this thesis, it is impossible to describe and evaluate the implementation of all articles of the convention that have an impact on educational policy. Therefore, four CRC articles were chosen to represent the convention's implementation in the school context: The "In the Best Interest of the

Child" principle, the "Child's Right to be heard, the "UN Goal of Education", and the "Right to Rest, Leisure and Play" (see Appendix 1). These specific articles have been chosen because they are relevant to the CR in Education discourse and together represent inherent tensions of the CRC. The "In the Best Interest of the Child" principle (Article 3) is one of the guiding principles of the Convention and can be judged as a paternalistic approach. The article is used to justify and guide decision-making by adults over the children rather than letting the children themselves take responsibility for their own matters. This principle can be contrasted with the child's right to be heard (Article 12) since what a child expresses or perceives often does not align with what adults consider best for the child. Due to this underlying tension and possible discrepancies, these two rights were chosen for this analysis to see the handling of both schools related to these rights.

Since this study deals with the implementation of children's rights in the context of education, it makes sense to additionally look at the one article of the CRC that the UN itself refers explicitly to education: The right of the child to education in light of the educational goal as defined prior (Article 29). To stick with the theme of CR's inherent tensions, the "Right to Rest, Leisure and Play" (Article 31) was chosen as an opposing right to the educational one. This choice was made since children and adolescents' time at school or other educational facilities might limit their valued leisure, play, and rest time.

The assessment of the NCG, as one of the various monitoring organizations, shows that improvements can and shall be made in the educational practices. The problem, however, is that in their suggestions, the coalition and the CRC itself remain vague. Hence, one does not know what the implementation of CR at schools can look like in practice. Additionally, it is compelling to research how these two exemplary tensions in the CRC play out in practice. This research gap leads to the research questions of this study.

1.5. Research Aim & Question

The double case study of this thesis will look at two schools, one inside the regular state school system and one in the private sector, that aim to implement CR into their everyday school practice. The emphasis of this research is to describe and compare the two approaches and, hence, answer the following question:

"How are the children's rights Articles 3, 12, 29 and 31 practised at a "Children's Rights School"
and a "Democratic School" in Germany, and how do the practices differ?"

The following sub-questions will accompany this question:

a) *How are the Children's Rights Convention Articles 3, 12, 29 and 31 implemented in the programs and poli-*
cies of the "Children's Rights School" and the "Democratic School"?

b) *What motivates the school community members to practise children's rights at school? What are the general*
difficulties in the process of implementing the Children's Rights Convention, and what are specific difficulties in
implementing Articles 3, 12, 20 and 31? Where do the school community members see room for improvement in
the implementation of these rights?

c) *Does the implementation of the Children's Rights Convention Articles 3,12, 29, and 31 create tensions in the*
educational practice?

As the implementation of CR into educational practice alongside the consequence of such im-
plementation is insufficiently researched, this research adds to the literature by narrowing this
gap. The double case study gives practical ideas for implementing these four CR and shows the
occurring difficulties in the process. Therefore, the insights of this research can be of interest to
policymakers in education, educators at all levels, and fellow researchers in the field of education
and CR. By looking at the tensions that can come with such transposition of CR into educational
practice, inherent flaws of the CRC can be shown and, following, possible problems in the im-
plementation will become visible. Consequently, further research can explore how to deal with
these tensions. The research can then be used in terms of a feedback loop. It shows shortcom-
ings in the current implementation of the CRC in educational practice and can help further im-
prove legislative policy and educational practice. This work can also spark further discussions in
the CR discourse.

2. Methodology

To answer the formulated research question, a qualitative case study was conducted (Yin, 2009). Both the UNICEF Children's Rights School (UCRS) and the Democratic School (DS) were thoroughly analysed in their context.

In order to find the participating schools, criterion-based sampling was used (Hennink et al., 2020) since one school had to have participated in the UNICEF training, and the other had that unique pedagogical concept of a democratic school. After finding possible schools through criterion sampling, convenience sampling (Hennink et al., 2020) was used to find schools close to the researcher's location. The eligible schools were then contacted, informed about the purpose and practicalities of this research, and agreed to participate.

To gain a deeper insight into the everyday life at both schools, the author of this paper spent a full school day at each school. In between the various interviews and activities, she participated in the school's daily routine, was allowed to observe individual lessons and engaged in an informal exchange with the children and adults at the school. This kind of immersion in the context of the two schools allowed a deeper insight and led to a better understanding of the content mentioned in the interviews. Thus, the experiences and impressions of the day, as well as the many conversations away from the microphone, also flow into the results of this work.

In addition to this fieldwork, the primary data collection methods were several semi-structured interviews (Galletta, 2013) and focus groups (Morgan, 1998). Interviews have been chosen as a suitable method to answer the research questions because they allow an in-depth conversation about underlying motivations for practising CR at school and the connected difficulties and ideas for improvement. School policy research, for example, does not allow for understanding the motivators behind implemented structures, how they are truly implemented in practice, and which aspects the school community finds most valuable. Additionally, it is unlikely that in an official document, the schools would discuss the tensions or difficulties that come with the transposition of the CRC. A semi-structured interview allows exploring these aspects. All questions and their links to the research question can be found in the Appendix (Appendix 3). For these interviews, a romanticist approach has been chosen (Alvesson, 2003). This approach is similar to the neo-positivistic approach, but the interviewer recognises their subjective position toward the interview partners and forms a rapport with them. While interviewing, the author of

this thesis was open about her interests in the research topics and shared this motivation with the participants. The researcher formed a personal bond with the participants to allow intimate and self-revealing conversations. Especially with the child participants, forming a rapport seemed helpful for the romanticist view of interviewing and as a general approach to child interviewing.

Five interviews have been conducted: At the UCRS, an interview with a teacher responsible for the UNICEF training, and an interview with two children (at the same time). At the DS, one interview with a teacher, one with the school founder and an interview where three to four children participated simultaneously.

The interview questions (see Appendix 3) were divided into four blocks. The first question block was regarding the motivations and backgrounds to implement CR at school. The second block was about the distinct features of the schools due to the UNICEF training and the democratic school concept. In the third block, the four CR of this research were discussed. Therefore, the following structure has been followed to generate data for each sub-question. First, the participants were asked about the importance of this right at school. Second, the interviewer asked about structures or policies that the schools have implemented for this specific right. Third, the participants were asked how they could further improve regarding this right and, lastly, what they would need to do so. For the children, the same structure was followed with modified questions.

Additionally, a Focus Group with individual school community members has been conducted. This kind of group discussion was seen as a suitable method since it allows insight into the perceptions of different school community members simultaneously. On each question, multiple perspectives were given that also sparked a discussion between the different actors at the school. These discussions allowed a more reflective and multi-perspectival view on the topic. Furthermore, it was important to the researcher that in a study about CR, children would be included in the discussions with the professionals. The participants found this inclusive approach valuable since they could get direct feedback from the children regarding their ideas and perceived difficulties.

At the UCRS, two teachers, two children, the co-principal and a mother participated in the discussion about the importance of CR and possible further improvements. In the spirit of a focus group, different questions (Krueger, 1998) were posed that the participants discussed together. The diverse setup guaranteed different perspectives on the mutual topic.

At the democratic school, one teacher and many children participated in the Focus Group. However, the teacher remained in the background, so the researcher added the interview with the school founder to get another adult perspective.

The focus group questions were designed to focus more on the perceptions of individual school community members and on creating an open dialogue between them. Questions mostly revolved around what the people value most at their schools and how they could further improve their schooling. Here, room for idealistic visions was also given, inviting the participants to think big (see Appendix 3).

The interviews and Focus Groups were recorded with an audio recorder and then transcribed using the transcribing software *Amberscript*. In total, six hours of interviews and focus groups have been accumulated. The data was then coded using the qualitative research analysis software *MAXQDA 2020*. The analysis process was a qualitative content analysis as defined by Kuckartz (2016). It will be described in the following:
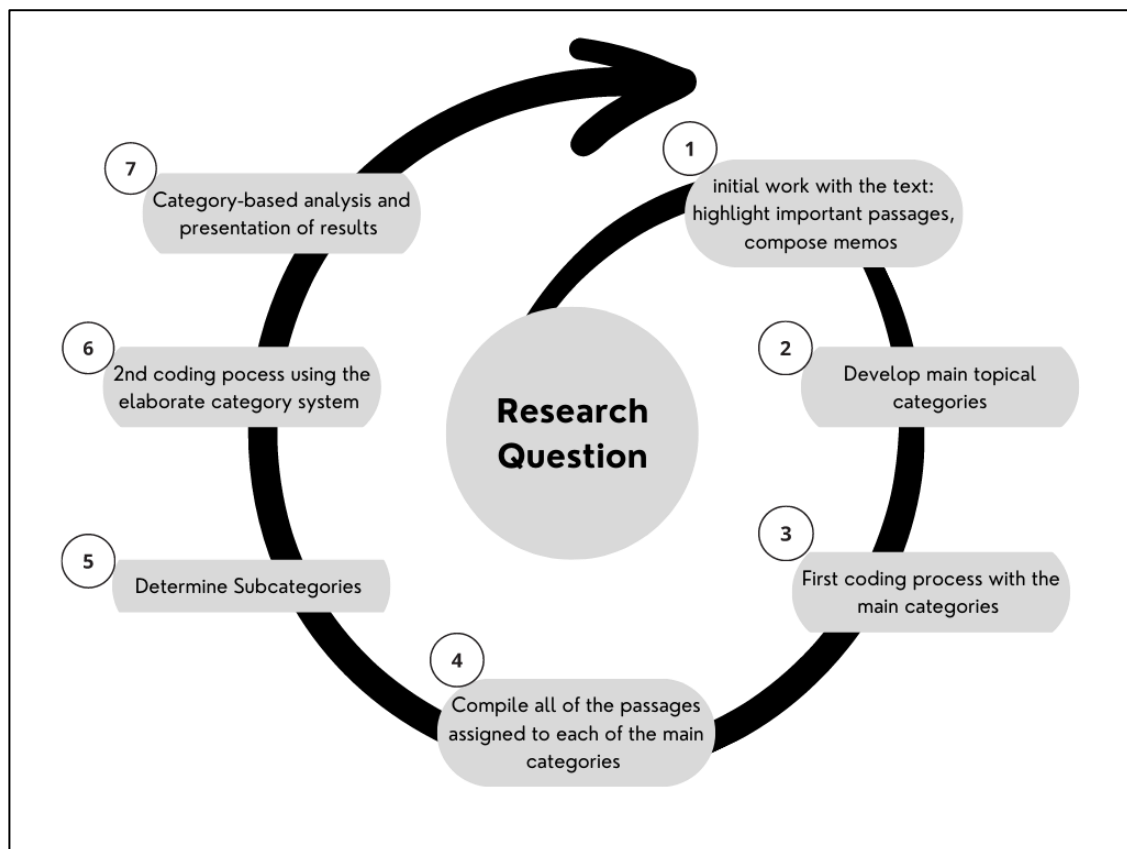

Figure 1: Flow chart of content structuring content analysis (based on: Kuckartz, 2016, p.101)

The first phase of data evaluation was the initiating text work: reading it once in its entity against the background of the research questions. The second phase of the content analysis was the formation of main thematic categories. Categories can be developed inductively or deductively. For the analysis in this thesis, the main categories were developed based on the research questions. Hence, the categories were: "Motivation / Justification to practice CR at School", "General Difficulties of being CR friendly", and "General Wishes for the future". Additionally, the four different CR at the centre of this thesis each formed a category. These four categories were each further divided into the subcategories: "Motivations and Justifications", "Established Structures and Concepts", "Difficulties for the Schools", and "Suggestions for improvement". All mentioned aspects during the interviews and focus groups were added and inductively coded as subcategories (see Code Book in Appendix 2). In the third phase, the material was coded with recognition of the formulated categories. In phase four, the coded passages were compiled for each category. This then led to phase five, the determination of sub-categories in the second round of coding (phase six). The final phase was the category-based analysis and presentation of results (Kuckartz, 2016).

This research cycle was conducted separately for each school's data (interview and focus group transcripts). Afterwards, the results were compared to see similarities and differences between the two approaches. This comparison was made by looking at similarities and differences in the code structure of the two cases and visualising it in a codebook (see Appendix 2).

To ensure good quality research, measures have been taken to meet the quality markers of credibility, reliability and transferability. For credibility and reliability, different additional procedures were used. During the interviews and afterwards, member checks (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) were done to ensure that the researcher understood the participants' statements correctly. These member checks entail summarising the findings during and after the interviews and focus groups and asking for confirmation and reassurance from the participants that the insights gained are correct. Additionally, the researcher wrote down impressions, feelings and doubts in a reflexivity log throughout the process. Furthermore, triangulation of the data collection methods has been used, which means using multiple methods and data sources. In this research, both focus groups and interviews were used to generate data, and the websites and concept documents of the schools were reviewed when in doubt of a mentioned aspect (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

In terms of transferability, it has to be mentioned that the reader of this thesis decides whether the results and outcomes of this study can be translated for their specific purposes. There is no intention to generalise these findings to every school; the focus lies on understanding the two chosen cases in their context. However, readers might find established structures, pitfalls and recommendations useful and take them as an example to improve their practice. Here analogy inference can be used since the findings can be expected to be similar in similar educational contexts. However, the research question was formulated purposefully modest to prevent readers from expecting a generalisation for all schools (Roulston, 2010).

In addition to these three prominent quality markers, Kvale (1996) formulated six criteria for judging the quality of an interview that have been studied before conducting the interviews. At the end of the interview day, they have been reflected on and found adhered to. To give two examples: The researcher posed short questions and got long answers from the subjects, and the interviewer attempted to verify her understanding of the interviewee's answers in the interviews.

In addition to dealing with the quality of this study, it has been ethically examined. Before starting the research, it was approved by the university's Ethical Committee. In addition to this approval, the researcher considered the Ethical Issues Checklist by Patton (Patton, 2015), which consists of the following six points. The researcher informed all participants about the purpose and methods of this study, ensured confidentiality and waited for informed consent before collecting the data. Every participant received an informational document and signed permission. For the child participants, a primary caregiver also gave permission. In addition to that, the data has been anonymised. All data with personal details will be deleted after the thesis has been approved and treated privately. There have been no promises or compensations for the participants. Furthermore, the researcher was in good mental health and required no ethical advice for her well-being. The interview and focus group questions have been considered safe and unharmful for the participants. However, the researcher clearly stated that no questions have to be answered by the participants.

3. Results

This chapter will present the results necessary to answer the research question and the connected sub-questions (see 1.5.).

First, the two schools will briefly be described to bring on a mutual understanding of the particular circumstances at both schools. This description includes the schools' demographics, a description of the UNICEF Training and the school concept of the Democratic School.

Second, to answer subquestion b, the general motivations for practising CR at school will be summarised based on the interviewees' statements.

Third, for all four CR in focus, the connected motivations, established structures, difficulties and self-assessed suggestions for improvements are shown. This section answers the research question a) and b). Fourth, general difficulties in practising CR at school will be presented alongside the general wishes and visions for the future. These two aspects also answer sub-question b). Lastly, to answer sub-question c), the critiques on CR are presented, followed by the author's own critical evaluation of the results.

3.1. Description of the two Schools

In the following, the two schools of this double case study will be briefly presented. The UCRS and DS aim to put CR into practice at their schools and were therefore chosen for this research. This subchapter will give information about the schools' location, funding, population and history, along with the schools' peculiarities concerning CR: The UNICEF Training and the Democratic School concept.

3.1.1. UNICEF Children's Rights School

The first example for the study is a publicly funded primary school in northwest Germany in the state of lower-Saxony with a population of around 300 children and 30 teachers. The primary school was founded in 1974 and started the UNICEF CR School program in 2021. Even before that, the school has implemented various concepts that ensure participation, recreation time and

a more child-centred pedagogy beforehand. These unique structures and approaches will be further explained in the following parts since they have been discussed in detail in the interviews. The following illustration shows the seven phases of this UNICEF training:
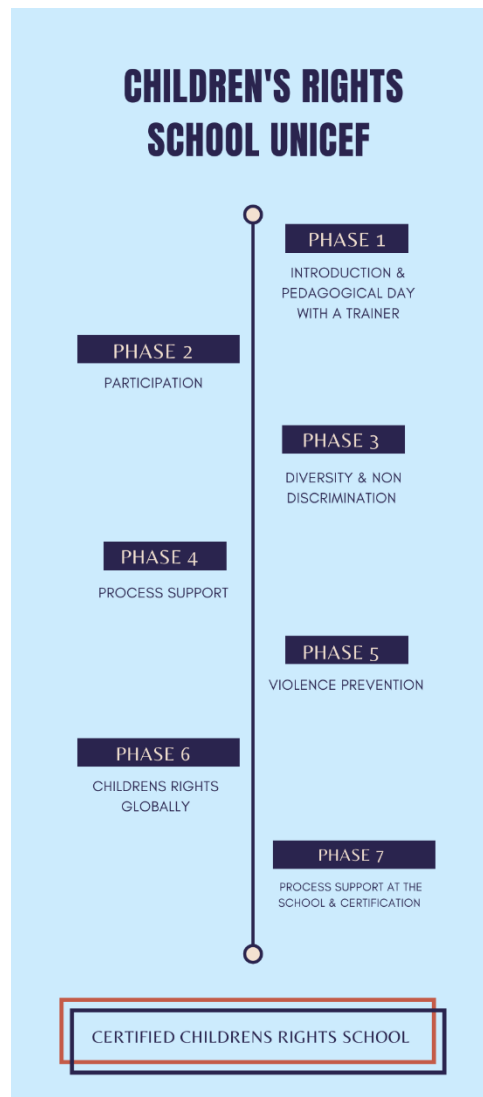
Figure 2: UNICEF CR School Phases (own figure based on (UNICEF,n.d.))

Each stage of the training consists of theoretical matter and applicable learning content for everyday school life. The kick-off event is the "pedagogical day", laying the groundwork for becoming a certified school. Here, all staff members are informed about the CR convention, CR education and how the CR can be put to practice in school. Further stages teach about participation, diversity and non-discrimination, violence prevention, and global CR. Throughout the training, the schools are accompanied by CR School trainers (Unicef, n.d.)

3.1.2. Democratic School

The second school is a Democratic School (DS) in northwest Germany. It was founded in 2020 and has a population of around 30 children, three teachers and varying numbers of professionals offering courses or projects throughout the year. It is a so-called free school, meaning that it is not run by the state but privately by an association.

The school founder formulated her aim for the schooling with the following words: *"It is about helping to shape an ecologically sustainable, meaningful, socially just, human presence on the planet through school"* (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 2).

Democratic Schools are the most liberal form of education in Germany, influenced by the principles of historic pioneers like "Summerhill" (founded 1921) and the Sudbury Valley School (founded 1968). However, the name does not mean that each democratic school operates the same way and follows precisely the same principles as Waldorf or Montessori schools. However, the European Network of Democratic Education (EUDEC) formulate the following principles that every democratic school follows:

> *"In any educational institution, students have the right*
> * *to make their own choices regarding learning and all other areas of everyday life. In particular, they may individually determine what to do, when, where, how and with whom, so long as their decisions do not infringe on the liberty of others to do the same.*
> * *to have an equal share in the decision making as to how their organisations — in particular their schools — are run, and which rules and sanctions, if any, are necessary"* (EUDEC, n.d.).

There are no mandatory classes at a DS but regular offers of courses, projects or opportunities for self-formed interest groups (Gray, 2013). The central organ of a DS is the school assembly. It is the decision-making body of the school and replaces teachers' conferences and students' councils. The pedagogical consideration behind this is that every human, regardless of age, has the same right to be heard and be a part of the decision-making process on topics that will impact them. The school assembly regulates most of the school's affairs, where everyone has an equal say, teachers and students the same. The decisions can be, for example, the rules for living together in the school, the budget for teaching and learning materials, school events, and hiring personnel (Gray, 2013). Additionally, before the weekly school assembly, the DS included a

"Rechtskunde-Stunde", a legal studies class where the students are informed about their rights in a child-friendly way (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos.2).

Now that the overall concepts of the two schools have been presented, the general motivations for practising CR at school will be analysed.

3.2. General Motivations to practise Children's Rights

In order to answer the first part of the sub-question b: *"What motivates the school community members to practise children's rights at school?"* the participants were asked why they believe CR should be a lived natural practice at school and what motivated them to do the UNICEF Training or, in case of the DS, include them as a part of the school concept.

This subchapter summarizes the general motivators that the school community members mentioned. General in a sense that they were not directly related to one right but as all-encompassing motivators. First, the aspects mentioned by the UCRS are presented, followed by the ones of the DS. Finally, the factors both schools have in common will be explained. This way, the schools are individually presented and compared. This structure will be upheld throughout the whole results section.

Even before starting the UNICEF Program, the UCRS decided and started to become increasingly more child-right-friendly. Several motivators have been expressed in the interviews and discussions.

First, CR are relevant to the everyday life of the children, but they were neither taught nor lived practice in the past. The co-principal mentioned that during her own schooling, CR had been introduced as a third-world-related issue and that it seemed irrelevant to everyday life in Germany. However, when researching and engaging with the topic further, it becomes evident that they affect every child, even in western developed countries and that there is a vast lack of implementation, as the following excerpt exemplifies:

> *"So, that was my idea of children's rights, but they had nothing to do with ME [...], but if you really dig deep, you actually realise how deeply it affects you and how little you implement them"* (Focus Group_UCRS, pos. 154).

In line with this argument, the participants mentioned a lack of knowledge about CR among students, teachers, parents, and society (Focus Group_UCRS, pos. 23). That needs changing to get the necessary support in implementing them in the child's everyday life (Focus Group_UCRS, pos. 117).

Another central idea on why CR have a place at school is to fight adultism, the power hierarchy between adults and children. The teachers and co-principal have mentioned that adults often decide for children and not with them (Focus Group_UCRS, pos. 29, 70, 77, 142). They usually mean well, but the next step is to include the students in relevant decision-making:

> *"We used to think about how we could do this well for the children, that it was good for the children. And since we set out to be a children's rights school, we have been trying to think with the children about how to do it well"* (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 142-143).

Changing the adults' relationship with the children by seeing them as equal and taking them seriously seems crucial:

> *"Behind every statement or wish, there is also such a deeper meaning. And if the children just have the experience every time that it doesn't matter what I say, it's all just dismissed anyway, then they no longer express these wishes. And I really think that's a mistake"* (Interview_UCRS_Teacher, pos. *44).*

This does not only count for schools but the general society:

> *"Germany has, at last, signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and therefore it is also the case that children are ultimately equal to adults. […] I believe it is something that we simply have to acknowledge socially too"* (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 116).

It needs to be socially accepted, but it also needs to be understood by the parents. A teacher at the school mentioned that she sees no contradiction between practising CR and parental rights. Instead, the parents should also acknowledge these rights in their parenting style (Interview_UCRS_Teacher, Pos. 40).

In addition to that, if they are encouraged and taught so at school, the students can use critical thinking skills to reflect on and challenge how they are parented. A mother in the group discussion valued the school's involvement in strengthening the child and empowering them to discuss issues at home in order to be heard and understood. Critical Thinking Skills are valued highly in

general, and the students are encouraged to do so from the first grade on since it is necessary for the challenges of the 21st century:

> "So *these are things that the children question on their own initiative, and I think that's particularly important, especially at this time, also with the Ukraine war. […] There were also many questions. Why is that? Who started it? Where does Putin get the right from? And so on. So these are all questions that are already asked in the first grade. And I don't think that would have happened in the same way if the children had not already learned / had learned beforehand to be allowed to question something critically*" (Interview_UCRS_Teacher, Pos. 8).

Lastly, answering why this kind of education should happen at school and not elsewhere, the participants mentioned that school could reach different children from different cultural backgrounds. And, in consequence, this should be where CR are taught and practised, subliminally by treating one another with respect and explicitly mentioning what rights children have (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 79).

The Democratic School Professionals have expressed the following motivations for CR. First off, the regular state schools system is a bureaucracy, which impacts schooling significantly as she explains:

> "*Because the system in itself is designed so that it cannot be child-friendly because it is almost not very human-friendly.[…] Bureaucracies actually take on a life of their own, which the people in them do not control. And that also applies to the school system, which is part of a bureaucratic system. And it is programmed under certain conditions, which […] do not take these children's rights into account and so, and so on. Therefore it is even more important that you actually bring them [CR] to the fore again and again and point them out again and again and also see how we can implement them*" (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 14-15).

Consequently, the school system is heavily dependent on bureaucracy, where the people making the relevant decisions are not part of the system. The CR are overlooked in this process, resulting in a status quo that needs to change (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 14-15).

Furthermore, the founder stresses that children and adults are not the same and that children deserve and need special protection:

"But I think that you absolutely need them [CR]. Because adults and children are <u>not</u> the same. They have equal value, but they are not the same, and, above all, they do not have equal power. And just then, it's something like a protection of minorities or something like that. [...] It's always easy to say that they are the weakest in society blah, blah, blah. Well, I wouldn't say the weakest. I would say that those who are less privileged in society and need our special attention and our special protection. And that's why we need children's rights at schools, because we have to deal with these children. And then in regular schools even more than here, we really need them" (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 14).

And then, she also stresses that knowledge about the rights is insufficient. They need to be a lived practice. Otherwise, the discrepancy between what they learn and what they experience is too big, leading to the children thinking that no one cares about their rights (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 12).

Both schools share the following two motivations. When children experience CR and value their implementation, they will go on to teach the next generation about them. This can be the next generation of first-graders coming to school or their own future children. This way, there will be a more thorough awareness of these rights over time (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 153, Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 20).

Furthermore, with knowledge and experience of CR, children will be able to advocate for them (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 79, Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 10). That is something even a child stated clearly in the interview:

"Why do you think it's important for children to know their rights?
00:13:47
Student 3: So they can say if they are not respected? Because if the right to equality is not respected and you think/ and you do not know what the right to equality is, you cannot say, "The right to equality is not be respected" if you do not know what that is" (Focus Group_DS, pos. 34-36).

Now that the general motivations for the schools to practice CR have been explained, following the four CR in tension to each other will be analysed.

3.3. In the Best Interest of the Child

In order to find out how the "Best Interest of the Child" principle was dealt with in everyday school life, the interviewees were asked what they needed to act in the best interest of the child, what motivated them to do so, what structures and concepts have been developed for this right, where difficulties occur, and, finally how they would self-evaluate their practices and what they suggest in order to improve further.

This subchapter answers the research questions a) and b) in light of the CRC Article 3.

3.3.1. What do you need for this right?

According to the UCRS teachers, to act in the child's best interest, one needs experience, time, bravery, a good team, and best-practice examples (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 158).

The DS founder mentioned knowledge about developmental models as a precondition for acting in the child's best interests. Additionally, a teacher needs integrity, authenticity, exchange with others, commitment to inner work, and self-improvement. On top of that, it is necessary to be open and empathetic and connect with the child emotionally. Then, you need to be able to differentiate between wishes and needs. Because it is in the child's best interest to have their needs met, however, this does not mean fulfilling their every desire. (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 57-59).

3.3.2. Justifications and Motivations

The UCRS School Community did not mention any specific motivators for implementing this principle.

The DS founder mentioned that this right has a special place at school. The school can be an alternative place for the children where different adults with different views and attitudes are available. This will help the child find their place, and the child is not dependent on what the parents alone think is best for children (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 57).

At the UCRS and DS, the children expressed that they usually know best what is good for them and that adults sometimes misjudge that. There are, however, some exceptions where they see the parent's judgement as necessary, mostly related to the question of what is healthy or safe (e.g. Interview_Children_DS, Pos. 185-209 & Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 126-128).

3.3.3. Established structures and concepts

A teacher at the UCRS mentioned that whenever the teachers come together to discuss the inclusion of a child and write an evaluation of the necessary individual support (Fördergutachten), they always keep the child's best interest in mind. The outcomes of such discussion are often a differentiation in class:

> "*And of course, you always have the best interest of the child in focus. […] It will be of no use to the child to calculate up to 1 million if he is only able to calculate up to 20. So, of course, as teachers, we also have to make sure that we put together differentiated material in consultation with the remedial teachers as well. What this / what then really helps the child and brings him further in his learning*" (Interview_UCRS_Teacher, Pos. 34).

Additionally, compromise can be used whenever the students and the teachers cannot agree on what is best for the child. A teacher mentions as an example that a couple of students protested against homework shortly before the holidays, and the teacher first explained the importance of homework. They then agreed on having less homework until the holidays (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 26).

Additionally, whenever safety is a problem, it is in the child's best interest to keep them safe, even though this might contradict what the child wants (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 26).

The DS teachers also mentioned considering the best interest in pedagogical decisions. They also said they intervene whenever there is a sign of child abuse (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 57).

3.3.4. Difficulties for the school

The UCRS teacher mentioned that it is difficult to navigate between conflicting views of adults and students since some decisions ought to be made by adults:

> *"It is not so easy at times, here and there are situations where you simply have to say, that the adults have to decide for you because you might not understand the full scope of your decisions"* (Interview_UCRS_Teacher, Pos. 6).

The DS mentions that the parents and the public restrict the school's freedom to act in the child's best interests.

> *"It is very, very difficult because that is not how the situation is in real life. The situation is not as if we were allowed to act in the best interests of the child. But, we are only allowed to act so far, that we have permission from the parents. As soon as we take a stand and go further than the parents would, the whole project is at risk. Because disgruntled parents can influence the public climate and even […] destroy such a project. And that is why often it is not decided in the best interest of the child here because it is only possible within the boundaries that the parents set. […] And if the parents are, for some reason, not able to judge a situation right, […] on what would be the best interest of the child then the child has to suffer because it has these parents. We cannot protect the children from their parents. […] When the emotional immaturity of the parents is harmful to the child, the school can't protect them from it"* (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 55-57).

Additionally, the DS's financial situation and the facilities sometimes limit the possibility of acting in the child's best interests (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 44).

Furthermore, assessing the child's best interest is not always easy. This often leads to a feeling-based judgement and observations (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 46-50).

3.3.5. Self-Evaluation

In the interviews and focus groups, the school community members were asked whether they see any room for improvement when it comes to implementing this right and, if so, what they would do to improve their practice further.

The UCRS teachers said that they should and will, in the future, ask the children even more frequently what their opinion is on their best interests (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 158).

The DS teacher expressed that it might be good to have a psychological professional available to allow a deeper inside into the child's feelings and thoughts so they feel supported and guided (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 51-52).

3.4. Right to be heard

This subchapter answers the research questions a) and b) in light of the CRC Article 12.

3.4.1. Motivations & Justifications

The primary motivation of the UCRS behind implementing structures for the right to be heard was to decide more with the children instead of for them (Interview_UCRS_Teacher, Pos. 6 & 44). Additionally, they mentioned citizenship education as a motivation (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 79-80, 124, Interview UCRS_Teacher Pos. 42). Here, citizenship was understood as being "mündig" (close to empowered) and enforcing their rights.

The DS founder added another motivation to allow children to be heard and participate in every decision affecting them. She sees that child participation is, unfortunately, rarely the case. She critiques even the UN procedures: *"There are still children's rights conferences today without a single child"* (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 24). Connected to that, she proposes that the right to be heard should instead be a "right of the child to get talked to". The children should have the right to be talked to by people making the decisions and engaging with child-related topics (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 49-51).

Additionally, both schools mentioned that having CR as a lived natural practice at school allows children to practise democracy (e.g., Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 79-80, Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 2). The school can be a place where, in a protected environment, students can learn, try and practise democratic procedures that prepare them for their future life in a democracy. This is, however, not only seen as an option but a necessity:

"It has to be said that if you want your child to become something and if you want your child to be able to make good decisions, also in terms of looking after others, then he or she must also be involved <u>now</u> and <u>must</u> be allowed to make his or her own decisions within an adequate scope" (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 124).

Both schools hoped that such an early connection (from the first grade) to democracy could help counteract political apathy, a developing problem in Germany (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 8 & 44, Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 12). Connected to that is the shared motivation (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 8) to make students feel self-efficacy:

„The future is still ahead of the children, and I hope that they will be independent and self-efficient: I am important in the world. I can bring on change. And that the children can demand this change and be interested in politics because they have received the basis for it in their education" (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 12).

3.4.2. Established Concepts & Structures

The UCRS has established the following concepts or methods to ensure the right to be heard at school.

Generally, the students and adults at school mentioned that they use the technique of majoritarian voting a lot when deciding, for example, whether the students want a new seating plan (Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 68). They also let the students vote on what topic should be next in class out of the pool of possible topics from the curriculum (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 20). In general, there is a philosophy within the teachers that students should be included in as many ways as possible:

"In general, everyone tries, / or this is actually also a bit of our philosophy at the school, that every colleague tries to involve the students in as many things as possible. Even if it is just to say: "Who of you might want to explain this calculation method?" That's where it starts so that the children can simply show their strengths independently. Or when students voluntarily want to do a presentation, we are very open to that" (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 6).

This also includes accepting feedback and suggestions from students (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 6).

The students also mention that they value the opportunity to talk to a school liaison teacher who listens and helps with problems, especially for issues they do not dare to bring up in class or for family matters (Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 59-61).

Most importantly, the UCRS has established the "Klassenrat and Schülerrat", a class and school council. The "Klassenrat" takes place weekly, and the "Schülerrat" approximately monthly (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 6). The class representatives usually guide through the process during Klassenrat. Every student has the chance to present a problem or a wish, and then the students decide what they can do to help or make it happen. The implementation of these suggestions is regularly revised in the following weeks to see if further action is required. For matters concerning the whole school, the School Council is responsible where each class sends their class representatives (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 20).
Both, students and teachers expressed that these two concepts are highly valued (e.g. Interview_Students_UCRS, Pos. 66, Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 20). The teacher explicitly mentioned that it also enables the children to reflect upon their behaviour when a problem is presented in the Klassenrat (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 22).

In addition to the above, the school uses various methods to give the students a chance to self-determine and have a say in what they would like to learn. They use explorative learning with self-chosen topics in the general and social sciences course (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 105-106) and project work (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 28). In addition, some classes have established a fixed period for students to be the teacher. The students can voluntarily choose any topic they are interested in and prepare a period where they are in charge (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 88). Furthermore, they are going on many field trips, which the students value (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 46).

The school has also swapped out the regular parent-teacher meetings with meetings where the children can show and present what they have learned so far, and all the participants talk with each other about the learning process rather than the adults talking about the child without its attendance (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 62 & 70).

At the DS, the following structures have been implemented. The school founder spends a lot of time working with individual students to ensure they are heard and correctly understood. She

stresses that it is insufficient to hear what students express and consider it. Instead, it is crucial to help the children realise and express their feelings and needs so that one can genuinely understand and hear them:

> *"Yes, optimally, the children think for themselves and have an idea of what they want. But this is not always the case. On the one hand, you could think, beautiful, everyone seems happy, no one is complaining. But we know that this is not the case […]. Sometimes, you cannot put what does not feel right into words and mention it to other people because you are unable to describe your experience"* (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 30).

Finding out how a student truly feels requires a lot of time conversating. Therefore, the founder and teachers take time to explain why they feel a certain way about the issue at stake. They also explain what other people might be thinking about it and give various perspectives on the situation to best help the children realise what they believe (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 29-30).

This concept of conversating with the children also applies to conflict resolution. The teachers at the school regularly assist the children in solving their problems together and eventually let them try independently (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 14).

As described in the theoretical part of this thesis, the school assembly is the central organ of a DS. The school assembly happens weekly, and every student has the chance to bring a proposal, problem or wish forward (e.g. Interview_Children_DS, Pos. 22-24). Additionally, the students decide on every school-related situation in equal vote with the adult school community members.

Equality, in general, is a big part of the school concept. When expressing a wish, the students are reminded of the connected responsibilities. It is then made clear that they are the responsible ones. For example, when students wanted chickens at school, the teacher made sure the students knew the responsibilities:

> *"Who takes care of the chickens? Who will clean the chicken coop? And so on, because the children are also responsible. The teachers cannot do it alone and are not the ones who should. This is your school; you have a say in it. And this is exhausting for the children because, at home, it is the case that the parents do it for them. And we want to get out this role, we want to be equal, also in responsibilities"* (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 18).

If a wish cannot be fulfilled or a problem cannot be solved, there is a list at school with things to do in the future when there is enough funding, personnel or other necessary resources (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 19-20). Additionally, the teachers regularly address that they still have it in mind to validate that they heard what the students expressed (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 19-20). The school founder also emphasised that the school's adults are involved in a sort of minority protection. She gives an example of how this can work:

> *"If there was a case of a child that wants to produce a dinosaur movie, but no one wants to partici-pate in this project. It is our responsibility to put this on the to-do list and say, okay, good, then one of us needs to take at least two hours to fabricate something with the child. So it can say, I have put my film idea into practice. Even if it is not a big project where 50.000 people worked on for three days, but so / because this is what I think our duty of care is in my opinion, that you take the men-tal well-being of a child into account, so that/because they cannot yet tolerate / because he is a small human being, that is not mature enough and deeply sad and disappointed"* (Inter-view_Founder_DS, Pos. 41).

It is also mentioned that that is not always possible, and then the teacher's task is to help the children deal with the disappointment (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 41-43).

Connected to this idea, the school founder mentioned that the school is getting more and more sociocratic since the students and teachers make sure that they do not solely majority vote. Rather, everyone should consent to a decision without strong objections (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 30).

Additionally, the school aims to ensure children's participation outside of school. They take the kids to political events so that they can engage with the world and be encouraged to participate. For instance, the week after the interviews, the school was temporarily moved into a yurt at an environmental camp connected to the climate conference of the state (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 49). Students should feel that they are allowed to attend these events, even though they might aim at an older audience. No one should despise them for being there; even further, the children have the right to be talked to at these events (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 49-51).

The children expressed that they value participation and feel completely equal to the adults at school. They also mentioned that they had a say in everything and explicitly stated that they have sufficient participation:

"Interviewer [Milena Lauer]: Would you like to participate even more at school? Or can you already participate everywhere?

00:15:28
Student 3: Yes, yes, yes, we can decide and have a say everywhere. That is almost a bit | more would be already too much for me.

00:15:35
Student 1: For me too!

00:15:36
Student 2: Yes, otherwise we have even more say than the teachers. We are almost the teachers! And if we had even more of a say, we would be above the teachers.
00:15:45
Interviewer [Milena Lauer]: And now you have the feeling you are exactly at the same level or equal with the teachers?

0:15:51
Student 1: Yes!

00:15:51
Student 2: Yes of course!

00:15:51
Student 3: Yes, the same"

(Interview_Children_DS, Pos. 149-156).

3.4.3. Difficulties for the school

The school community member of the UCRS mentioned the following difficulties that come with this right. A student mentioned that sometimes what he says is not perceived at all, and the teachers and students do not hear when he expresses an opinion (Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 45-50).

Both UCRS students also mentioned that they sometimes do not dare to express "meaner things" in the public classroom setting (Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 51). However, the students did not elaborate on what exactly they meant by that.

Sometimes, so the students, they cannot come up with enough ideas on their own (for example, if they are free to choose what to do in a sports lesson). Therefore, they wish to be able to select

from alternatives so they do not have that overload of having to decide too much (Interview_Children_UCRS_Pos. 83-91, Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 85).

For the DS, one of the difficulties lies in preventing old habits when interacting with children by giving them a quick and easy answer in a conversation when it could have been a good learning opportunity to help the child understand the underlying needs or feelings (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 30).

Another difficulty is the school's financial situation, which limits what the school can do for the children (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 18).

On top of that, if a child is in danger, the child's preference cannot be fulfilled, and the adults must step in (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 18).

Overall, the development of the school assembly and the necessary democratic competencies of the students to express themselves and make use of their right to be heard is a process that takes time and practice (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 22-24).

3.4.4. Self-Evaluation

In order to further improve the implementation of this right, the UCRS teacher mentioned that the next step is to create one fixed procedure for the "Klassenrat" that is the same for each class to ensure equality between them (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 10).

The students express that they wish to have more of a say in what to learn. They propose that in art class and physical education, the teachers should offer various activities, and each student should be allowed to self-decide what to do: *"Children like to make decisions on their own; you can tell that"* (Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 83).

They also expressed the wish to decide more on relevant issues. *"You could even / you could maybe more / simply enlargen the "Klassenrat" so you can do more there. […] And that we can decide more"* (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 137).

One student also expressed the wish to self-decide on matters rather than participate:

"I believe children should make many decisions by themselves. We have a right to co-determination but we should also be allowed to decide many things by ourselves. Not only co-determine but self-determine" (Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 143).

On top of that, a student wishes to participate in politics and have children present there:

"It would be nice if children could participate in politics since it /many adults only think about stocks and money and are egoistic. But kids/kids think about the good. Think about, for example, what is right and not what brings the most money" (Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 143).

The DS founder mentioned that she wishes to create more and more "Keimzellen" (sources of inspiration) for child participation. When they have the opportunity to participate (e.g. in politics) and tell the other students about their experiences, it can motivate and inspire them to participate too (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 47).

3.5.   UN Goal of Education

This subchapter answers the research questions a) and b) in reference to Article 29, the UN Goal of Education.

3.5.1. Motivations and Justifications

The UCRS Community did not mention motivations or justifications for this CR article.

The DS founder finds the UN Goal of Education to prepare the child for responsible life in a free society vital since too many people take on responsibility in the world that have not even learned to be responsible for themselves. Only when one knows how to take responsibility for oneself one can be responsible for others. Since the students are responsible for their own learning and school life, they learn that skill early on (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 65).

3.5.2. Established Structures / Concepts

The UCRS linked the question about the UN goal to inclusion. The school has an inclusive concept where all children can be schooled (e.g., Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 37). Additionally, they included a concept called "the island". The island is a safe space run by special needs teachers, where individual children can go or be sent to during a school period if they might benefit from doing their tasks in a more private, calm and supported setting. There the children are guided through their work and, once done, have the opportunity for play, arts or conversations (based on field notes from observations and Interview_Teacher_UCRS, pos. 12).

They also implemented the unique concept of the "Eingangsstufe", which the students and teachers highly value. When students start school at the age of six, they would usually go into first grade. At the UCRS, they begin with this "Eingangsstufe" (Entrance Level), an age-mixed heterogenous group consisting of the first and second grades. Here the students learn the basics needed for further schooling, like reading and writing from and with each other. They stay for first and second grade but can also repeat the "Eingangsstufe". This allows more time for personal development (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 51-52).

The teacher of the DS says that with the school's concept of self-directed education, they work towards that goal because of the *"freedom they have to develop themselves and their own personalities. In one child there lays this potential in another one that and that they [students] also value this"* (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 27-28).

3.5.3. Difficulties for the schools

For the UCRS, connected to the concept of inclusion, the problem is that the school does not get enough special needs teacher "hours". There are not enough special needs teachers, and the bureaucracy complicated the procedures. The same goes for the lengthy and overcomplicated process of getting school assistance for children (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 12 & 36).

For the DS, the societal circumstances are a difficulty. For once, the meritocracy stands in contrast to the school's philosophy:

> *"It is always like that. You need to achieve something in society. Otherwise, you are a nothing. And yes, that really is a problem. This achievement-based society poses problems for us. You are not worth anything if you do not achieve something. […] And that needs to change"* (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 34).

Secondly, most people in society still have the traditional school system in mind. Therefore, it is hard to bring on change and build a system that differs from what older people have experienced themselves. Consequently, this traditional system remains, and the students are "trapped" in it. Therefore, the DS tries to make a good impression on the local community to get their positive attention by setting a good example of alternative education (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 30).

Lastly, as stated in the UN goal, preparing children for life in society is difficult due to the uncertainty of this future:

> *"We have an uncertain future. At this moment, even more so because of the war that is so close to us. And the children can feel it and are affected by it more or less. We discuss it and try not to develop so many fears / many already are scared about this or that. And we aim that they can move as freely as possible here in the safe space"* (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 30).

3.5.4. Self-Evaluation

According to the teacher, the DS would benefit most from a conceptual change in thinking about learning. It would be best if people said:

> *"Man, they are getting so much more competencies if learning is happening so freely and we work with projects or, yes, more free. And yes, it must be more anchored in the society and changed in society"* (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 34).

The UCRS did not mention any suggestions for improvement regarding this right.

3.6. Right to Rest, Leisure and Play

Lastly, sub-questions a) and b) are answered regarding CRC Article 31.

3.6.1 Justifications & Motivations

No specific motivations have been expressed. However, all members said this right is important and highly valued.

3.6.2 Established structures and concepts

To meet this right, the UCRS has established the following concepts:

- o A rental service for recess play-material (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 30),

- o no homework on Fridays and before public holidays to maximize rest and free time (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 32),

- o the opportunity to opt-out of homework with a note from the parents (when too much or too complicated (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 32),

- o a maximum of 30 min of homework per day (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 31-32),

- o and diverse and welcoming play opportunities in a big schoolyard (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 30).

At the DS, students have as much time as they want to play and relax, as described in the theoretical part of this thesis. Classes are voluntarily, and studying happens self-determined (e.g. Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 69-76). In addition, the students can leave a course or other learning situation whenever they want (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 53).

The school also has a flex-time, meaning the children can come and go however suits the family rhythm, as long as they fulfil the legal weekly attendance minimum (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 54).

3.6.3 Difficulties for the schools

A UCRS student mentioned that sometimes the homework is too difficult or too much (Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 109 & 113). One student said he was scared that the teachers in secondary school would not care about it anymore:

> *"I sometimes say, I have too much homework and sometimes the teachers say that is all right. But now I am soon going to secondary school, and there the teachers won't care I believe […], they probably say, you have to do it or otherwise go into detention"* (Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 120).

For the DS, the biggest challenge is that the parents need to accept and support the freedom and non-traditional understanding of learning (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 38). Some parents also deregistered their child in the past and said*:*

> *"That is not what our child needs. My child needs that „Sit down!" and these regulated traditional lessons, the structure of it. We [at the democratic school] sometimes do not provide the children with that amount of structure, but instead say, freedom, freedom, freedom"* (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 22).

Additionally, the students at school must be reminded, or remind themselves, that a school is still a place for education and that there are many educational offers they can take. The teacher's responsibility is to remind and sometimes even motivate the students for these opportunities (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 38-40).

3.6.4 Self-Evaluation

The UCRS students proposed multiple ideas to improve their free time and create more opportunities for rest.

First, they would like easier and less homework to be done faster (Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 109). Second, they would also value the option of doing a couple of minutes of digital learning apps at home once a week if the regular homework is too complicated or they do not feel like

doing it (Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 115). Third, they also wished for a space to relax and lay down at school for when they are tired:

> *„At school, I would wish for/ if, for example, you are too exhausted and can't concentrate anymore*
> *that you can go somewhere and lay down for a quarter of an hour or 20min." […] So you can have*
> *tranquillity and recuperate"* (Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 97-100).

Therefore, they propose a voucher system, with a voucher rewarded for good work or just given out every week or two (Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 103 & 107).

The DS community did not mention any room for improvement concerning this right.

3.7. General Difficulties for the schools & Visions for the Future

Now that the practices of the two schools have been presented concerning the four chosen CR, the general difficulties for the schools when trying to implement CR into school practice are discussed alongside the participants visions and wishes for the future. This chapter serves the purpose to further answer sub question b), about the general difficulties and possible improvements when implementing CR.

The UCRS teacher mentioned that the CR are often not recognised by the children yet. They do not see the connection between everyday practices like, for example, the Klassenrat and the corresponding right to be heard. These links must be made more explicit (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 14).

When discussing difficulties at the UCRS, the most mentioned topic was the curriculum requirements (e.g. Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 78, 142, 155-156). There is a tension between what the curriculum requires the child to learn in a certain timespan and what truly is of interest to the child.

> *"And then this needs to be weighed up; how free can I be in the content of my teaching? What is / what*
> *is essential? What is really necessary? Basic reading and writing, there is no way around it. But then it*
> *is the question, when kids really struggle with it, / with reading. Do we then really need to force it on*

the children in the first year or year and a half? Or does it happen on its own at some point? […] As a teacher, that is really difficult. […]" (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos 78).

The teachers experience tension between what the curriculum claims necessary and how to deal with struggling children that you would need to force against their will to fulfil the curriculum requirements (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 78).

When asked about an ideal scenario where these issues are taken care of, the school community members envisioned a sort of campus where the students do not have to go to fixed classes but work interest-based in different rooms dedicated to a specific topic or interest or even resting areas. There the students could learn at their own pace. The teachers would not have to grade the students anymore. Instead, they would discuss the individual learning process with the students. They would mutually set goals and next steps that take basic education and the best interest of the child into account (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 176).

Lastly, the contrast between modern schooling and the adults' own biography is expressed as a difficulty:

> *„Mother : Yes, it makes it difficult not to pressure your child. […] You yourself had so much pressure at school and to understand now / yes, if my child does not make it the first try, then it still has the chance to get 3, 4, or 5 times the same or different assignments. And it is no big deal.[…] That makes it very very difficult in the beginning not to put your own felt pressure to perform on your child"* (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 35).

The mother therefore suggested that that the parents should be informed about CR-friendly parenting by the schools (Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 150-152).

The students of the UCRS wish to have the opportunity to fill out a report sheet for the teachers to give feedback on how well they implement the CR at school (Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 166-168).

For the DS the defunding from the state is the biggest hurdle:

> *"My biggest hurdle is this / this / this / this one / De-funding what they do with us. So this/this/this precarious financial situation, that's our biggest hurdle. Which also does not take children's rights into account at all. By the way, zero, because ultimately what / what do you want?*

They don't want to finance these schools through it. Okay, who do you want to target with it? The people who want such a school, so to speak, the customers of such a school. You want to target the parents by saying, "Yes, if you really want that, you have to pay money." But who do you actually take away the money from, that he is entitled to? Because of the educational mission of the country? The country is charged with the education of all children. That is / the money that is spent on the education of the children actually belongs to the children" (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 67-68).

The teacher further expressed societal limits for CR implementation (Interview_Teacher_DS, Pos. 54 & 56). When the children start an apprenticeship, work, or go to different secondary education, things are different from the democratic school. For example, the flex-time of the school, where every child can come at their own time, is mostly not accepted in the working field. Furthermore, each child's unique capacities and talents might not be seen.

Additionally, the school founder hopes that having children in politics will be normalised in the future. That includes using simple language so that the students and many others understand and engage in the discussions (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 71). Connected to this idea, the bureaucracy needs to become more human. In an ideal world, the children could participate in ministries in a team with politicians (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 69).

Both schools also share three significant difficulties.
First, the children of both schools critique mandatory schooling (e.g. Interview_Children_UCRS, Pos. 160, Focus_Group_DS, Pos. 16-22 & 49-50). They express that they would like to have the option to stay home if they want. One student even stated that she wanted to become a politician and found a political party that advocates against mandatory schooling (Focus Group_DS, Pos. 50).

Second, bureaucracy is mentioned as a problem. For the UCRS, it overcomplicates different procedures (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 36), and the DS is also connected and influenced by the bureaucratic system (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 69). At the same time, so the DS founder, it should not be the goal to take schools out of bureaucratic systems since this can result in dan-

gerous schools where adults can abuse the power they have over the children without supervision (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 69).

Third, both schools mentioned that many CR were restricted during the Covid 19 Pandemic. The Schülerrat at the UCRS could not take place for months, and at the DS, valued aspects of the school could not be upheld because of the restrictions (e.g. Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 142, Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 18-20).

On a different note, both schools also hope that the CR find their way into the constitution, putting it on the agenda for politics and fostering acceptance and acknowledgement in society (Interview_Founder_DS, Pos. 14, Focus Group_UCRS, Pos. 29).

This concludes the description and comparison of results from the data. In the following sub-chapter, some points will be critically evaluated and related to tensions inherent to the CR discourse.

3.8. Critical Evaluation of Results

This chapter aims to answer the sub-question c): *Does the implementation of the Children's Rights Convention Articles 3,12, 29 and 31 create tensions in the educational practice?*

First, the gained insights will be related to the pre-identified inherent tensions of the CRC between Articles 3 and 12 and 39 and 31. Then, additional tensions and critical questions that emerged from the data will be presented.

First of all, the tensions between the four chosen CR of this thesis can also be witnessed in the two school cases. Concerning the guiding principle of "In the Best Interest of the Child" and the opposing "Right of the child to be heard", it has to be mentioned that all child participants at the schools believed that they know what is best for them. According to the children at the DS and the UCRS, there are only some health and safety-related aspects where adults might know better than them what is good for children. The adults, too, experience this discrepancy. An apparent conflict was when at the UNICEF school, the children expressed in the School Parliament that they would like to have more official climbing trees. Then, during an inspection of the school grounds, it turned out that the only existing climbing tree was no longer safe to climb on. This

resulted in the fact that against the wishes of the children but in their best interest (from the paternalistic perspective), they ended up with no climbing tree instead of more, as they wished (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 26). This poses only one of several examples visible in the data for this inherent tension.

Regarding the second two articles that are in conflict to each other, the "UN Goal to Education" and "The child's right to Rest, Leisure and Play", the following observation was made. At the DS, informal learning through play or conversating is valued just as high as classical school-associated learning. However, with the unlimited play and rest time and no mandatory classes, this tension is pre-programmed. Even though no child is ever forced to participate in anything, the teacher mentioned that there are certain situations where they need to encourage some children to take part in an educational offer:

> *"It is also an educational institution. And we are obliged to bring education to the children. And that's quite easy […] for some children, they understood it that way and the parents made it clear to them. But other children come with the attitude, "Nope, I don't need that and I don't have to do it". And then, sometimes we do have to say: "Come, why don't you take advantage of this offer, go to the reading lesson or do that and that, because that helps you too"* (Interview Teacher_DS, Pos. 38).

Other advocates of free democratic education would argue with the statement that sometimes the teachers have to motivate the students to take part in an educational offer since there are many schools where this sort of encouragement is not wanted. Nonetheless, it demonstrates the pre-identified tension between these two rights.

Apart from the tensions that were the starting point for this analysis, the following additional tensions were observed during the study.

Both schools mention that it is their job to prepare the children for life in democracy. The CRC, however, never mentions democracy as the desired form of governance. Instead, it states that children should be prepared to live responsibly in a free society. Because Germany is a democracy, most of the German literature and discourse on implementing CR focus on preparing the children to be democratic citizens (e.g., Backhaus et al., 2008; Edelstein et al., 2019; Kaletsch & van Altenburg Dieken, 2019; Krappmann, 2019; Moran-Ellis & Sünker, 2010; Prengel & Winklhofer, 2014; Rademacher, 2019). It is of importance, however, to question this goal. It is no coincidence that democracy is not mentioned in the CRC for political reasons but also because it

should not be seen as the ultimate goal. There are tensions between democratic procedures and CR. The founder of the DS even mentioned this aspect when she stated that they are becoming more sociocratic because the simple democratic processes often leave children unsatisfied and unheard. Therefore, they try a new form of reasoning where everyone needs to consent to the decision. Furthermore, she says that the teacher's role is, in fact, also to engage in some sort of minority protection and make sure that the children that are not heard in the decision-making will not get discriminated against. If a democratic decision negatively impacts a child, the staff tries to meet its need and ensure that the child gets heard. This discrimination of minorities in a democracy is a common problem and a significant weakness of this governance form. In a simple majority voting process, for example, it is possible that almost 50 per cent of people are not heard. Minorities are often even discriminated against because they never have the chance to get a majority. Hence, democracy can conflict with the child's rights to be heard and not be discriminated against. This tension becomes visible in the data, yet both schools still mention the aim of preparing children for life in democracy as one motivator to practise CR at school.

This brings us to the next aspect of possible tensions when implementing CR at school. It is to question what impacts and consequences a child-right-oriented education has on the children in the future? After the presentation of results and the corresponding values and aims, it seems like this way of education can only be in the best interest of the child. But, how will it impact the children in the long run? At the UCRS, as mentioned prior, one student fears he will not be treated in the same attentive and rights-respecting way at secondary school. He here implicitly mentions another tension of practising CR at school: A clash of realities. Is it in the children's best interest, to put it bluntly, to live out an ideology at school when the reality looks so different? Might it be frustrating for the children at the democratic school to experience complete self-determination without being graded and having a say in every decision affecting them, when in the meritocratic society with the underrepresentation of children in democracy, they will not be able to keep this up?

This discrepancy between reality and the children's schooling links nicely with another tension observed in the data. The vision behind the DS and, to some extent, also the UCRS is that through a new kind of education, different citizens are formed that then influence society positively. True to the motto: Be the change you want to see in the world. While both are desirable, the change in schooling and the change in society, it is questionable whether this is an instrumentalization of the children. Is it morally justifiable to change the child's education so that they will

later bring change to this world? Especially when considering the clash of realities they will most likely experience as a result of their different education. For example, the DS founder has formulated that they regularly take the children to political events to serve their right to participate and be heard in the decisions affecting them. Due to the principles of the school concept, the students go voluntarily, but is it assured that they genuinely want to participate and understand the purpose of their attendance? On the one hand, pioneers are needed to change society, and education is essential in bringing out these pioneers. On the other hand, people should not be used for a specific purpose. In the end, it remains a trade-off. Is it harmful to educate children to be a particular kind of democratic citizen to bring about change in society? Or is it worthwhile to go down this path and possibly instrumentalize the children for the future of many more children? This question cannot be answered easily, but it is worth posing it and reflecting on it when thinking about CR and Education.

This leads us to another tension that might be even more relevant in the German context. Preparing children for democracy is also seen as necessary because, as Edelstein et al. (2019) put it, our state came to the brink of ruin in the first half of the last century because of crimes fostered by the lack of democratic education of many of its citizens. No institution other than the schools is in a corresponding position to take on this task of democratic education (Edelstein et al., 2019). Therefore, it seems logical to teach democratic values and make this a central aim of our schooling. However, fostering democratic values, such as participation and solidarity, can also be critiqued as indoctrination (e.g. van der Ploeg & Guérin, 2016). Again educators and policymakers need to be aware of this tension, and more research needs to be done on how to deal with it effectively.

Lastly, as the DS founder mentioned, there is a difficulty with the bureaucratic system. On the one hand, the system, with the overcomplicated and regulated bureaucracy, is not supporting the implementation of CR. On the other hand, when there is less influence and regulation by the bureaucracy, it can lead to adults abusing the power and freedom they have at these free schools by, for example, posing their political beliefs on the children. There has yet to be found an effective way to prevent this abuse of freedom from happening.

4. Discussion & Conclusion

When looking back at the research question: *"How are the children's rights Articles 3, 12, 29 and 31, practised at a "Children's Rights School" and a "Democratic School" in Germany, and how do the practices differ?"*, the results have shown that both schools, in their way, have reflected on and implemented structures and concepts to practise CR at school. Many are organizational and practical, such as the Class Parliament or School Assembly. However, there was also a lot of discussion on ideological aspects that shape school life. Both schools mentioned that the attitude and mindset at the schools toward the CR is a crucial factor in implementing them. Only when supporting children's equality and understanding why they have these unique rights one can implement them into school life.

While the results section compared these two schools in terms of similarities and unique aspects for each school, it became visible that the school concepts and circumstances around them are hardly comparable. On the one side, we have the regular state primary school that tries to put the CR into practice within that bureaucratic inertial system. On the other side, we have the DS that operates outside the regular school system, less influenced by the bureaucracy, using this freedom by rethinking significant aspects of education in a more child-right-friendly setting.

What is striking is that the idealistic vision the teachers and co-principal of the UCRS developed in the group discussion comes very close to the reality of the democratic school: self-chosen learning objectives, no fixed classroom, no grading, and flex-time suiting the family's schedule. Hence, the idealistic pedagogical attitudes and goals seem similar among the different educational professionals. There seems to be mutual agreement on what would benefit the children and their schooling. So why has the UCRS not implemented these aspects yet?

Here, the differences between the state and the private school sector become relevant. Besides the freedom a "free" school has in terms of methods and curriculum requirements, the democratic school has a very small population of under 30 children. The school community will grow over the years but will probably stay below the UCRS's population of 300. In addition to that small class size, the DS has a bigger student-teacher ratio and can devote more time to each individual. The school founder and teachers highly valued this possibility of a personal relationship with each student because, as described in the results section, a lot of learning happens through conversations. They serve as a tool to ensure the child is heard and can express their feelings,

needs and thoughts on an issue. On top of that, while still having to guarantee that the students will develop the same competencies as a regular state school, they have freed themselves from the contents of the curriculum. These aspects are significant advantages the DS has over the state UCRS. It allowed them to live out many elements of the formulated idealistic future that the UCRS adults brought forward.

However, a substantial disadvantage for the DS is the dependency on the parents. Whereas the UCRS teacher mentioned that she sees no conflict between parental rights and the implementation of CR (Interview_Teacher_UCRS, Pos. 40), the DS depends on the parents. The boundaries set by parents limit the possibility of acting in the child's best interest since the school needs the parents' support and the public's acknowledgement. The UCRS, on the other hand, seems less dependent on the parent's approval.

Nevertheless, the UCRS is limited in what they can do due to the masses of children, their heterogeneity, and the challenges the bureaucracy poses. It is hard to foster child participation if not even the teachers can have a say in relevant school-related issues, and the schools do not have a say in staff decisions, use of resources or other state-made decisions (Brügelmann, 2014). The fact that the state schools cannot decide on many things themselves, is unfortunate and can cause frustration among students and teachers. However, this structural disadvantage does not justify renouncing democratic structures in state schools (Wilke, 2008). The UCRS realizes this and, within their boundaries, established structures and methods that allow participation of the students. Wilke (2008) mentioned that especially methods that allow different approaches to one topic and individual responsibility for the learning process are a good start for the protection of CR. At the UCRS, they established periods with project-based work, explorative learning or self-taught lessons by children, as described in the results section. The structural limitations are not exclusive to the right to be heard but also apply to other rights. For example, the state school does not have the freedom to offer unlimited play time. But, they try to have a rich repertoire of recess activities the students can engage in, making the most out of the limited playtime.

Hence, the UCRS attempts to improve the state system from within, whereas the DS operates outside of it, allowing it to advance faster. It is, so I believe, important to have both: Schools outside of the system that set an example of how things can be done differently and schools inside of the system that try to make a difference for every child, instead of the privileged few. Not every child can go to a democratic or free school because of the limited number of these

schools and the monthly school fee that needs to be paid. Often, there are free school spots financed through scholarships or solidarity fees from other school community members. However, the precarious funding situation makes it impossible to offer every child a free spot. Therefore, it is critical that state schools also take the initiative instead of waiting and depending on school reform.

Interestingly, the UCRS children also perceive the boundaries that the state school experiences. When asking them about possible improvements related to the CR, they did not, like the teachers, envision such an idealistic conception but offered concrete suggestions that fit the context. There is, for example, the voucher system they proposed to gain access to a quiet room to relax and recharge. They imagined it limited to once a week or every two weeks for fifteen to thirty minutes. This very modest suggestion can be interpreted as them trying to improve the status quo while knowing that a drastic change is not possible or very unlikely. However, the student's statement that this voucher can only be attained through good work is seen critically by the author of this thesis. It might be a sign that the students think rights are a privilege that can be "unlocked" through hard work instead of a right that everyone has regardless of their work quality or other external factors. In line with this way of thinking, another student expressed that he was scared that the teachers at the secondary school would not care about his right to relax and play anymore. Here, the notion that a right can be taken away is presented, supporting the previous argument. However, since there were only these two testimonies, there is insufficient evidence for the claim that the students see these rights as privileges that are only sometimes deserved. Nonetheless, it stresses the tension that was elaborated on prior, that there is a discrepancy between the reality of schooling and how "real" life works. This clash of realities needs to be taken into account.

It also seems as if the UCRS students think of participation at school as a form of majority voting and co-determination. They explain, for example, that they often vote on what they do in a period or express the wish to choose upon alternatives. As presented in the results, one student explicitly mentioned that she would like to self-decide more instead of co-determine the outcome of a decision. However, they do not propose ways of introducing this self-determination at school. This observation is another interesting difference between the two schools. They differ in the way that child participation is pursued. There are many different models on the different levels of student involvement (e.g., Hart, 1992; Schröder, 1995) which address these different levels. At the DS, the students self-determine their learning and everyday school life or even self-

govern the school through the school assembly. In the hierarchy-oriented child-involvement models, these are the highest forms of participation. The UCRS students are also involved at school but mainly in the sense of co-determining and participation. These two forms of involvement are just below the other two and include participation through voting, giving feedback or engaging freely in projects or an activity that an adult has proposed.

As mentioned earlier, the students at the UCRS School are influenced by the system they are a part of, which impacts their way of proposing improvements for the schools. The DS students, too, are part of their own context and seem to have trouble understanding other forms of education. When asked about the differences between their school and other schools, some students showed a general lack of understanding of public school as the following excerpt illustrates: "*And there you always have to learn. I mean, I don't get that. Why do you always have to learn there? Are the teachers there dumb, or what's happening?*" (Focus Group_DS, Pos. 45). When talking about grades, a student even asked what grades are. This shows that democratic education impressively questions everything society thinks about education and shows how new concepts can be tried out if the possibilities are there. The children are convinced that they have enough say and equal rights and are almost "the teachers". The interviews show that the students are pleased about their freedoms and believe this is the best school for them. While this schooling might be in the child's best interest in the current situation, as mentioned above, it is questionable whether this positively impacts them later on when they get released into a society where this is no longer upheld. In today's society, with the achievement orientation and the flaws of democracy, the students will experience this potentially harmful clash of realities.

Both schools have in common that implementing CR at school is motivated by preparing them for life in a democratic society by practising democracy. Many studies conclude that even in primary school, children can be politically socialised (e.g. van Deth & Abendschön, 2007; Richter, 2007). This thesis again shows an example of how this is done early in the child's school career. The CR convention serves as a basis to justify this political preparation since it encourages teachers and adults to acknowledge all children's rights and duties at any level in school. Hence, the students should be treated as citizens and not solely as citizens to be, meaning including them in the decisions that affect them (Solhaug, 2018). While preparing the children for their future life, keeping the mentioned possible contradictions and tensions between CR and democracy is vital.

This concludes the discussion of the results. The author hopes her thesis can be relevant for educators and policymakers looking for inspiration on how to implement CR at school. Based on the four exemplary CR, motivations, structures, and the schools' difficulties and improvement suggestions have been presented. Additionally, tensions when implementing CR at school have become visible that need to be considered. Further research can be done to find a way to deal with these tensions. Another possibility is to research the implementation of other CR or other school forms that aim to be child-right conform.

The research of this thesis is limited by the small number of participants and the subjectivity of answers given in the process. The researcher has only spoken to a small fraction of people at the schools on one school day. It is possible that other aspects would be mentioned on another day and with different interlocutors. The interviews with individuals, even if they were selected to represent a particular group, do not mean that all children, teachers or parents share the same viewpoints. Especially questions about motivations and difficulties and visions for the future are highly subjective. The readers of this paper must understand this and decide for themselves, as described in the methodology section, to what extent there is analogue inference, and the results can be applied to other contexts. Here, large-scale surveys on individual aspects would have to be conducted in order to get a better feel for these possible diverse opinions. It is furthermore quite conceivable that the voluntary nature of participation means that people who have a particular interest in children's rights in some way are more likely to offer themselves as interview partners. In the case of children, it must also be questioned who the teachers have chosen to participate and for what reason.

Furthermore, the research is limited by the researcher's and respondent's optimistic view of the CRC. It should not be neglected that due to the positive basic attitudes of the researcher and both schools towards the CRC, the opposing opinion was not sufficiently dealt with. Further research could look deeper into the critique on CR and possibly find case studies of schools or people who actively oppose the implementation of CR in the educational context. This topic is not covered in this paper. Nevertheless, the emerging tensions in the implementation of CR have been recognised and reflected upon. The author of this paper made sure to ask the right critical questions to gain insight into the ethical difficulties that arise in implementing CR at schools.

To conclude this thesis, it can be stated that the CRC has implications for educational practice. It provides ground for a new understanding of children and childhood. Now, thirty years after Germany ratified the convention, CR are still not a lived natural practice at all schools. We only stand at the beginning of this process, and further improvement is necessary. Some schools, such as the two case study schools of this thesis, have begun this journey and tried to translate the CRC into their everyday practices. They could, in this case, become pioneers of change in making CR at school a priority. While both schools have implemented many structures for child-right-friendly schooling that create the impression of being in the child's best interest, it is crucial to keep an open mind to possible tensions and contradictions inherent to the CR discourse in Education.

References

Alvesson, M. (2003). Beyond Neopositivists, Romantics, and Localists: A Reflexive Approach to Interviews in Organizational Research. *The Academy of Management Review*, *28*(1), 13–33.

Backhaus, A., Knorre, S., Brügelmann, H., & Schiemann, E. (Eds.). (2008). *Demokratische Grundschule - Mitbestimmung von Kindern über ihr Leben und Lernen*. Eigenverlag, UniPrint: Druckerei der Universität Siegen. https://doi.org/10.25656/01:13014

BMFSFJ. (2022). *Kinderrechte ins Grundgesetz*. https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/themen/kinder-und-jugend/kinderrechte/kinderrechte-ins-grundgesetz.

Brügelmann, H. (2014). Kinderrechte: selbst-und Mitbestimmung in der Grundschule. *Grundschule Aktuell: Zeitschrift Des Grundschulverbandes*(127), 6–11.

Edelstein, W., Krappmann, L., & Petry, C. (Eds.). (2019). *Debus Pädagogik: Band 1. Kinderrechte in die Schule: Gleichheit, Schutz, Förderung, Partizipation* (3rd ed.). Wochenschau Verlag.

EUDEC. (n.d.). *Democratic Education: What is democratic education?* https://eudec.org/democratic-education/what-is-democratic-education/.

Galletta, A. (2013). *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*. New York University Press.

Gray, P. (2013). *Free to learn: Why unleashing the instinct to play will make our children happier, more self-reliant, and better students for life*. Basic Books.

Hart, R. A. (1992). *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship* (Innocenti Essays No. 4). United Nations Children's Fund.

Hennink, M. M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. 1. (2020). *Qualitative research methods* (2E). Sage.

Kaletsch, C., & van Altenburg Dieken, M. (2019). Klassenrat – Basis für Kinderrechte und Demokratie an der Schule . In W. Edelstein, L. Krappmann, & C. Petry (Eds.), *Debus Pädagogik: Band 1. Kinderrechte in die Schule: Gleichheit, Schutz, Förderung, Partizipation* (3rd ed., pp. 118–130). Wochenschau Verlag.

Krappmann, L. (2019). Kinderrechte und Demokratiepädagogik in der Schule: Zum Auftakt. In W. Edelstein, L. Krappmann, & C. Petry (Eds.), *Debus Pädagogik: Band 1. Kinderrechte in die Schule: Gleichheit, Schutz, Förderung, Partizipation* (3rd ed., pp. 12–19). Wochenschau Verlag.

Krueger, R. A. (1998). *Developing questions for focus groups* (Vol. 3). Sage.

Kuckartz, U. (2016). *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse: Methoden, Praxis, Computerunterstützung* (3rd ed.). *Grundlagentexte Methoden*. Beltz Juventa.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitive research interviewing*. Sage.

Liebel, M. (2013). *Kinder und Gerechtigkeit: Über Kinderrechte neu nachdenken*. Beltz Juventa.

Maywald, J. (2011). Brauchen wir eigene Kinderrechte im Grundgesetz? In G. Geiger (Ed.), *Kinderrechte sind Menschenrechte!* (pp. 47–58). Verlag Barbara Budrich.

Maywald, J. (2021). Kinderrechte in Deutschland: Eine Bestandsaufnahme anlässlich 30 Jahre UN-Kinderrechtskonvention. In M. L. Pirner, M. Gläser-Zikuda, & M. Krennerich (Eds.), *Menschenrechte von Kindern und Jugendlichen im Kontext Schule* (pp. 15–30). Wochenschau Verlag.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation, 4th Edition*. John Wiley & Sons Inc.

Moran-Ellis, J., & Sünker, H. (2010). Kinderpolitik und Kinderschutz - Demokratisierung durch Kinderrechte. *Jahrbuch Für Pädagogik*(1), 211–227. https://doi.org/10.3726/261403_211

Morgan, D. L. (1998). *The focus group guidebook. Focus Group Kit: Vol. 1*. Sage.

National Coalition Deutschland. (2019). *Die Umsetzung der UN-Kinderrechtskonvention in Deutschland: 5./6. Ergänzender Bericht an die Vereinten Nationen*. National Coalition Deutschland.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Prengel, A., & Winklhofer, U. (Eds.). (2014). *Kinderrechte in pädagogischen Beziehungen*. Verlag Barbara Budrich.

Rademacher, H. (2019). Kinderrechte und demokratische Schulentwicklung: Am Beispiel des hessischen Projekts Gewaltprävention und Demokratielernen. In W. Edelstein, L. Krappmann, & C. Petry (Eds.), *Debus Pädagogik: Band 1. Kinderrechte in die Schule: Gleichheit, Schutz, Förderung, Partizipation* (3rd ed., pp. 94–104). Wochenschau Verlag.

Richter, D. (2007). Politische Bildung von Anfang an. *Wochenschauverlag*.

Rosenow-Williams, K., Bücker, K., Burmann, J., Hanschur, J., Kesper, K., Müller-Antoine, M., & Stolz, J. (2019). *My place, my rights–Jetzt rede ich! Deutschlandweite UNICEF-Umfrage, Gesamtbericht zu den Umfrageergebnissen*. Deutsches Komitee für UNICEF. https://www.unicef.de/blob/203746/746153b4bb4c0d0a027f7fc09d11b7af/report-umfrage-pdf-data.pdf.

Roulston, K. (2010). Considering quality in qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Research*, *10*(2), 199–228. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794109356739

Schröder, R. (1995). *Kinder reden mit! Beteiligung an Politik, Stadtplanung und Stadtgestaltung*. Beltz.

Solhaug, T. (2018). Democratic Schools – Analytical Perspectives. *Journal of Social Science Education*, *17*(1).

Student, S. (2019). Schule als "Haus der Kinderrechte". In W. Edelstein, L. Krappmann, & C. Petry (Eds.), *Debus Pädagogik: Band 1. Kinderrechte in die Schule: Gleichheit, Schutz, Förderung, Partizipation* (3rd ed., pp. 68–76). Wochenschau Verlag.

Unicef. (n.d.). *Schulen leben Kinderrechte*. https://www.unicef.de/informieren/schulen/kinderrechteschulen.

Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx

van der Ploeg, P., & Guérin, L. (2016). Questioning Participation and Solidarity as Goals of Citizenship Education. *Critical Review*, *28*(2), 248–264. https://doi.org/10.1080/08913811.2016.1191191

van Deth, J. W., & Abendschön, S. (2007). *Kinder und Politik: Politische Einstellungen von jungen Kindern im Grundschulalter*. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften Wiesbaden.

Wilke, M. (2008). Was sind demokratische Schulen – und: Kann es demokratische Grundschulen wirklich geben? In A. Backhaus, S. Knorre, H. Brügelmann, & E. Schiemann (Eds.), *Demokratische Grundschule - Mitbestimmung von Kindern über ihr Leben und Lernen* (pp. 249–300). Eigenverlag, UniPrint: Druckerei der Universität Siegen.

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). *Applied Social Research Methods: Vol. 5*. Sage.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Children's Rights Articles

Article 3: In the Best Interests of the Child

"In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration" (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, Article 3).

Article 12: Right, to be heard

"States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (Convention on the rights of the child, 1989, Article 12).

Article 29: UN Goal of Education

"States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to: a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations; c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilisations different from his or her own; d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin; e) The development of respect for the natural environment" (Convention on the rights of the child,1989, Article 29).

Article 31: Right to Rest, Leisure & Play

"States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" (Convention on the rights of the child, 1989, Article 31).

Appendix 2: Codebook

Category	Definition	Subcodes		
		Democratic School	**UNICEF Children's Rights School**	**Both**
1. Motivation / Justification to practice CR at School	All motivations and justifications a participant brings forward on why CR should be practiced at a school level are coded in this category. Key example: *Milena Lauer [Interviewer]: You always have a right of the child in the assembly which you then discuss. Why do you think it's important for children to know their rights? 00:13:47* *Student 3: So that they can say if this is not adhered to! Because if the right to equality is not respected and you think/and you do not know what the right to equality is, you cannot say, "The right to equality is not respected", if you do not know what that is.*	1.1. System is a bureaucracy and not child-friendly 1.2. Children and adults are not the same 1.3. Knowledge about CR is not enough, lived practice	1.4. Relevance of children's rights for everyday life 1.5. Not enough knowledge over children's rights 1.6. Adultism (Adults decide for kids not with them) 1.7. Seeing children as equal and taking them seriously 1.8. CR and parental right do not contradict each other 1.9. Critical Thinking Skills 1.10. Possibility to reach all cultures at one place 1.11. being respectful with one another	1.12. children can pass knowledge on the next generations 1.13. advocating for their own rights

Appendix 2: Codebook

2. General Difficulties of being CR friendly	All general difficulties that the participants mention in relation to working at or running a school with the general aim of respecting and practicing CR are coded into this category. They are not coded here if they exclusively relate to one of the 4 CR in focus. Example: *"My biggest hurdle is this / this / this / this one / De-funding what they do with us. So this/this/this precarious financial situation, that's our biggest hurdle. Which also does not take children's rights into account at all. By the way, zero, because ultimately what / what do you want? They don't want to finance these schools through it. Okay, who do you want to target with it? The people who want such a school, so to speak, the customers of such a school. You want to target the parents by saying, "Yes, if you really want that, you have to pay money." But who do you actually take away the money from, that he is entitled to? Because of the educational mission of the country? The country is charged with the education of all children. That is / the money that is spent on the education of the children actually belongs to the children."* *[Interview School Founder Freie*	2.1. Defunding of DS 2.2. Societal Limits (e.g. higher education, work field) 2.3. Grading & judgement	2.4. Contact with "Behörden" / authorities 2.5. Children's rights are not recognized by children yet 2.6. Curriculum Requirements 2.7. Meritocracy / achievement-oriented society 2.8. Contrast to the own biography	2.9. Mandatory schooling 2.10. Bureaucracy 2.11. Covid 19 Pandemic

Appendix 2: Codebook

	Schule: 67 - 67 (0)]			
3. Right to be heard	Every aspect mentioned by the participant after asking about this specific right will be coded here. In order to suit the research question, further subcodes have been formed prior to the coding.			
	3.1 Motivations / Justifications	3.1.1. Children's opinion is not asked when making decisions	3.1.2. Decide with the children not for them 3.1.3. Citizenship Education	3.1.4. practicing political participation & democracy 3.1.5. Counteract political apathy 3.1.6. Experiencing Self-Efficacy
	3.2. Established structures / Concepts	3.2.1. Conversating with the children to ensure that they are heard 3.2.2. Help children realize what they are feeling / thinking 3.2.3. Offering help for problem-solving & conflict resolution 3.2.4. School Assembly 3.2.5. Equality of Responsibilities	3.2.13. majoritarian voting for decision making 3.2.14. choosing the order of topics in class 3.2.15. General philosophy of child participation among teachers	

Appendix 2: Codebook

		3.2.6. List of things that cannot be fulfilled just now 3.2.7. Focus on minority-protection 3.2.8. Learning to deal with disappointment 3.2.9. Getting even more sociocratic 3.2.10. Take kids to political events 3.2.10.1 Engaging with the world and be encouraged 3.2.10.2. Giving children the feeling of being allowed to be present 3.2.11. Right, to be talked to 3.2.12. Students feel as if they have sufficient participation & are equal to the teachers.	3.2.16. Accept feedback and suggestions from children 3.2.17. Students value that they have a liaison teacher 3.2.18. "Klassenrat & Schülerrat" / Class & School Council 3.2.19. Working methods: 3.2.19.1 explorative learning with self-chosen topics 3.2.19.2 project work 3.2.19.3 Students are teachers for a day 3.2.19.4 field trips 3.2.20. "Lerngespräche" instead of Parent-Teacher conferences	
	3.3 Difficulties for the schools	3.3.1 Old habits in interacting with children 3.3.2 Financial responsibilities 3.3.3 Dangerous situations limit child's influences 3.3.4 It is a process / needs practice	3.3.5. Sometimes other people don't perceive what a child is expressing (Student Perspective) 3.3.6. Children do not dare to express certain things	

			3.3.7.	Children can not come up with enough ideas on their own	
			3.3.8.	Overload of having to decide too much	
	3.4 Suggestions for Improvement	3.4.1. To create more "Keimzellen" to motivate for participation	3.4.2.	Create one general system for the "Klassenrat"	
			3.4.3.	Students want to decide upon alternatives what to do in a period	
			3.4.4.	Children wish to decide on more matters	
			3.4.5.	Self-decide rather than participate	
			3.4.6.	Children want to be involved in politics	

Appendix 2: Codebook

4. UN Goal of Education	This category entails all aspects mentioned by an interviewee that were mentioned after the UN Goal of Education was presented.			
	4.1. Motivations / Justifications	4.1.1. too many people take responsibility that can't be responsible for themselves 4.1.2. taking responsibility for yourself = more responsible for other		

	4.2. Established Structures / Concepts	4.2.1 Freedom to develop freely through self-directed Education	4.2.2. Inclusive Education
			
			    4.2.2.1 The Island
			    4.2.2.2. Eingangsstufe	

	4.3. Difficulties for the schools	4.3.1. Meritocracy / Archievement oriented society 4.3.2. Traditional thinking in society 4.3.2.1. Try to set a good example 4.3.3. Uncertainty about the future	4.3.4. Not enough remedial teacher "hours" 4.3.5. Procedures of getting school assistants for children	

Appendix 2: Codebook

	4.4. Suggestions for Improvement	4.4.1. Conceptual change in thinking about learning 4.4.2. Students wish for more of these free schools		
5. Right to Rest, Leisure and play	In this category every aspect dealing with the free, rest or leisure time of students is coded. This includes aspects that are impacting this right positively or negatively.			
	5.1 Motivations / Justifications	5.1.1 want to spend time outside		
	5.2 Established Structures / concepts	5.2.1. Self-determined studying = as much time for rest and play as they want 5.2.2 freedom to leave a class whenever to the benefit of everyone 5.2.2.1 great for teachers to work with inter-	5.2.4 "Pausenausleihe" / rental service for play material 5.2.5 no homework on Fridays and before public	

		ested group 5.2.2.2 frustrating for teachers when students are not motivated 5.2.2.3 understanding and empathy for this decision 5.2.2.4 reflect with students on their feelings 5.2.2.5 guide teachers to deal with it 5.2.3. Flextime	holidays 5.2.6 if homework is too difficult a note from the parents is sufficient 5.2.7 maximum of 30min homework a day 5.2.8 many play opportunities in recess	
	5.3 Difficulties for the schools	5.3.1 Parents need to accept non-traditional learning 5.3.2 DS still a place for education	5.3.3 Students think Homework is too much / too difficult 5.3.4. Boy worries that the Right is not respected at Secondary School	
	5.4 Suggestions for Improvement		5.4.1 Easier and less homework 5.4.2. Digital learn apps as an alternative 5.4.3 wish to have a space to relax / lay down if they are tired 5.4.3.1 voucher system as an idea	
6. In the Best interest of the Child	In this category all mentioned aspects related to the IBIC article are coded.			

Appendix 2: Codebook

	6.1. What do you need for his right?	6.1.1. Knowledge about development models 6.1.2 Integrity and authenticity 6.1.3 Inner work and self-improvement 6.1.4. Being open, empathetic and connect with the child 6.1.5. Differentiate between needs and wishes 6.1.7. Approach everyone with love (Jesper Juul).	6.1.8. Exchange with others 6.1.9. Experience 6.1.10. Time 6.1.11. Bravery 6.1.12 Good team 6.1.13 Best practice examples	
	6.2. Justifications / Motivations	6.2.1. School as an alternative place with different adults		6.2.2. Students think that they usually know what is best for them (except health & safety)
	6.3. Established Structures / Concepts	6.3.1 Consider Best Interest in pedagogical decisions 6.3.2. Help whenever child abuse is happening	6.3.3. Evaluation for Support (Fördergutachten) 6.3.4. Differentiation in Class 6.3.5. Compromise whenever adults / children do not agree 6.3.6. Keep children safe even when conflicting with a child's views	

Appendix 2: Codebook

	6.4. Difficulties for the schools	6.4.1 Parents and public restrict schools freedom to act IBIC 6.4.2. Difficulties due to the facilities 6.4.3. Financial difficulties 6.4.4. It is not easy to see the best interest *6.4.4.1* More of a feeling-based judgement	6.4.5. Difficulty navigating between conflicting interests 6.4.6. Students do not understand full scope of their decisions	
	6.5. Suggestions / improvements	6.5.1. Psychological professionals	6.5.2. Asking the child more often about their best interest	
7. General Wishes for the Future	In this category general wishes and visions for the future are coded. The participants were asked many questions about their ideal visions / futures. Key Example: *"So I also think you have such a picture of such a learning and living space in the style of a campus in mind. Maybe, where everyone has a little bit of their own goals in mind and is also supported in them"* *(Focus Group_UCRS).*	7.1. Society needs to reflect on their view on children 7.2. Normalizing Children in local politics 7.2.1. simple language 7.3. Chances to broaden your horizon 7.4. Bureaucracy need to become more humane 7.5. More child-friendly through child participation in ministries 7.6. Bildung / Herzensbildung	7.1 children would like to fill out report sheets for the teachers 7.9. No fixed classes 7.10. Work Interest based in own tempo 7.11. Fixed rooms for different interests 7.12. No grading but discussions	7.18. CR in the constitution

Appendix 2: Codebook

		7.7. Students profiting from democratic education 7.8. Wishes for public schools: More projects, smaller class sizes, more teachers, possibilities to participate in programs outside of the schools	7.13. Mutually set learning objectives 7.14. Students should be allowed to teach / be experts 7.15. Spaces for quietness 7.16. More democracy in school that carries on in society 7.17. Parents have to be informed about CR friendly education	
8. Democratic Schooling	8.1 Perceptions of School from Students	8.1.1 learning happens all the time 8.1.2 to study you need a clear head 8.1.3 students do not understand the concept of "Normal" schools 8.1.4 grades are seen as useless and harmful 8.1.5 more to experience than at normal schools 8.1.6 at free schools students think more clearly		

Appendix 2: Codebook

		8.1.7 students think they have their schooltime in happy memory later	
		8.1.8 children are happy at a "free" school	
		8.1.9 good student-teacher relationship	
		8.1.10 feel like they have a say	
	8.2 Valued Aspects	8.2.1 advantage of a small group size	
		8.2.2 imagination instead of knowledge	
		8.2.3 no grades	
		8.2.4 nice facilities	
		8.2.5 flextime start and end of the day	
		8.2.6 "having enough time"	
		8.2.7 environmental protection	
		8.2.8 collecting rubbish weekly	
		8.2.9 freedom to do whatever you want to do	
		8.2.10 students value trust & kindness of the employees	
		8.2.11 "Miteinander" / togetherness	
		8.2.12 self-determine when to learn	

		8.2.13 being in nature / outside
		8.2.14 participation
		8.2.15 intrinsic motivation to communicate with a Ukrainian refugee
		8.2.16 Theater Project
	8.3 Additional CR at school	8.3.1 Protection from violence
		8.3.2 Right to education
		8.3.3 Right to freedom
		8.3.4 Non-discrimination
		8.3.5 Right to an opinion
	8.4 Critique on CR	8.4.1 CR do not always influence children
		8.4.2 too much critique instead of action

Appendix 2: Codebook

	8.5 Concept	8.5.1 Learning happens a different way (play, conversations etc.)	
		8.5.2 School tuition but also free spots	
		8.5.3 Intrinsic motivation for academic learning comes at some time	
		8.5.4 Experience nature and freedom to value it for the future	
		8.5.5 School development is a process	
		8.5.6 Many practical offers by different professionals	
		8.5.7 School Assembly	
		8.5.8 Learn where your boundaries are and respect other boundaries	
		8.5.9 Students do not have to have the same knowledge level as other Kids	
		8.5.10 Students are perceptive for different things at different times	
		8.5.11 Rechtskunde	

Appendix 2: Codebook

	8.5.12 Difficulties / Limitations	8.5.12.1 so much freedom not for every child 8.5.12.2 child experiences pressure from parents	
	8.6 Purpose	8.6.1 Self-efficacy and self-value 8.6.2 Bringing on change in the world 8.6.3 Shaping an ecologically sustainable, meaningful, social just human presence on the planet 8.6.4 Child Rights as a part of the Motivation 8.6.4.1 Frustration of who cares about CR	
9. UNICEF CR School	9.1 Students Perspective		9.1.1 Value sugar free policy to maintain healthy students 9.1.2 Students value nice teachers 9.1.3 Value Klassenrat 9.1.4 Value "Pausenausleihe" / rental service for play material in recess 9.1.5 Child-Rights disregarded 9.1.5.1 verbally aggressive teacher at some stage

Appendix 2: Codebook

	9.2 valued aspects		9.2.1 Individuality
			9.2.2 Inclusion
			9.2.2.1 Insel-Project
			9.2.7 Creating a good active learning atmosphere
			9.2.8 "Lerngespräche" instead of "Elternsprechtage"
			9.2.9 School dogs
			9.2.10 Concept of the "Lernhäuser"
			9.2.11 Spatial conditions due to new construction
			9.2.12 Concept of the "Eingangsstufe"

Appendix 3: Interview & Focus Group Questions

Adult Interview Questions			
o Introduction o Research Aim & Motivation o Structure of the interview (4 Blocks) o Rules & Agreements on breaks / skipping questions etc. o Privacy Statements o Permission to Record			
Topic	**Both**	**DS**	**UCRS**
Question Block 1: **Background / Motivation** **Sub question b):** What motivates the school community members to practise children's rights at school?		o Can you briefly explain the concept of your school? How do you experience everyday school life in comparison to other schools or your own school biography? (connected to children's rights) o What are your core beliefs for your school concept? o Which aspects of the concept do you consider particularly valuable? Why? o What fixed structures are there in everyday school life? (Morning circle, school assembly, mentor talks?) o How is the school concept accepted by children and parents of their school community?	o When did you start to deal with children's rights? o What triggered this interest? o What structures with a direct or indirect connection to children's rights have you already established before your training? o Where do you see your role as a school in terms of children's rights? o Is there also something you criticize about children's rights?

Appendix 3: Interview & Focus Group Questions

Question Block 2: **School Concept and CR** **Sub question a):** How are the Children's Rights Convention Articles 3, 12, 29 and 31 implemented in the programs and policies of the "Children's Rights School" and the "Democratic School"?		o Were children's rights part of your motivation to found a free democratic school? o What role do children's rights play in everyday school life? o Where do you see your task /obligation as a school in relation to children's rights? o Why are children's rights needed in schools? <u>Follow-up questions</u> How does XY work? How exactly does XY look like?	o How did the training with UNICEF take place? o Which structures did you introduce or intensify as part of the training? o What has changed since the beginning of the training? o How was this received by the school community? o How useful did you find the training? – What might be missing?
Question Block 3a: **Right to be heard** **Sub question a):** How is the Children's Rights Convention Article 12 implemented in the programs and policies of the "Children's Rights School" and the "Democratic School"? **Sub question b):** What are the general difficulties in the process of implementing the Children's Rights Convention and what are specific difficulties in implementing Article 12? Where do the school community members see room for improvement in the implementation of this right?	o How important do you think this right is? o How are the concerns and opinions of your pupils perceived and heard in their everyday school life? o What possibilities does a student have to express his/her opinion? o Are there certain organisational structures (e.g. a student parliament) that have made it their task to fulfil this right? How does this work?		

Appendix 3: Interview & Focus Group Questions

Sub question c): Does the implementation of the Children's Rights Convention Article 12 create tensions in the educational practice?	o How are these offers accepted by the pupils? o How do you deal with the case that the children's opinions and wishes CANNOT be taken into account in some cases? o Where do you see room for improvement with regard to this child right? - What would you need to be able to implement it?		
Question Block 3b: **Right to Rest, Leisure & Play** **Sub question a):** How is the Children's Rights Convention Article 31 implemented in the programs and policies of the "Children's Rights School" and the "Democratic School"? **Sub question b):** What are the general difficulties in the process of implementing the Children's Rights Convention and what are specific difficulties in implementing Article 31? Where do the school community members see room for improvement in the implementation of this right? **Sub question c):** Does the implemen-	o How important do you think this right is? o How is this right dealt with at the school? o How important do you consider this right to be? o Are there specific concepts / ideas established at the schools in regard to this right? (e.g. Homework regulations, Break) o Do you think the children have enough time to move/play and relax? During and after school? o Where do you see room for improvement with regard to this child right?		

tation of the Children's Rights Convention Article 31 create tensions in the educational practice?	- What would you need in order to be able to implement it?		
Question Block 3c: **In the Best Interest of the Child** **Sub question a):** How i**s** the Children's Rights Convention Article 3 implemented in the programs and policies of the "Children's Rights School" and the "Democratic School"? **Sub question b):** What are the general difficulties in the process of implementing the Children's Rights Convention and what are specific difficulties in implementing Article 3? Where do the school community members see room for improvement in the implementation of this right? **Sub question c):** Does the implementation of the Children's Rights Convention Article 3 create tensions in the educational practice?	o Is the best interest of the children seen and included in school decisions that affect the children? o Do you have specific criteria that help you to consider the best interest of the child when making decisions within the school? (Who decides?) o Where do you see a need for improvement with regard to this child right? What would you need in order to be able to implement it?		
Question Block 3d: **UN Goal of Education** **Sub question a):** How i**s** the Children's Rights Convention Article 29 implemented in the programs and policies of	*(1) States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to,* *a) To develop fully the child's personality, talents and mental and*		

the "Children's Rights School" and the "Democratic School"? **Sub question b):** What are the general difficulties in the process of implementing the Children's Rights Convention and what are specific difficulties in implementing Article 29? Where do the school community members see room for improvement in the implementation of this right? **Sub question c):** Does the implementation of the Children's Rights Convention Article 29 create tensions in the educational practice?	*physical abilities;* *d) To prepare the child for a responsible life in a free society [...];* o How do you think your schooling contributes to achieving this goal? o Where do you see difficulties in achieving the educational goal? o In an ideal world, what would you need at the school to get even closer to this goal?		
Question Block 4: **Looking back & Looking forward** **Sub question b):** Where do the school community members see room for improvement in the implementation of these rights?		o Where are difficulties in running a child rights compliant school? What resources do you need? Tell about things you have tried to introduce but were not successful. o Do they have any criticism of the Convention on the Rights of the Child? o You are a best-practice example of this research: What else would you like to give other schools to enable the living of children's rights at school? o What are you particularly proud of at your school?	o What are you most proud of about your school? o Where could you get even better? o Would you renew your participation in the UNICEF Children's Rights Schools training? o Where are the difficulties in running a school that complies with children's rights? Do you talk about things they tried to introduce but weren't successful? o What advice would you like to

Appendix 3: Interview & Focus Group Questions

		o Looking back, would you change anything about your school concept? Do you think the school concept will develop further in the future? o Imagine going to sleep tonight and waking up 20 years in the future. It is an ideal future. What does your school look like in terms of children's rights? - Is it at all desirable that children's rights are respected at school? Why? o Imagine you had one minute to talk to the Ministry of Education about the life of children's rights in schools, what would you tell her / him?	give to other schools to enable the life of children's rights in school?
This is the end of the interview. Those were all the questions I had. Would you like to add anything else?			

Appendix 3: Interview & Focus Group Questions

Children Interview Questions
o   Introduction o   Research Aim & Motivation o   Structure of the interview (4 Blocks) o   You are my experts o   Rules & Agreements on breaks / skipping questions etc. o   Privacy Statements o   Permission to Record

Topic	Both	DS	UCRS
Question Block 1: **Introduction to the Topic of CR**		Your school is a free democratic school o What makes this school so special? o Do you know what children's rights are? ➔ If needed, short explanation / pictures / poster UNICEF o What do you think about children's rights?	Your school is a UNICEF Children's Rights School. o Do you know what children's rights are? o Have you learned a lot about children's rights? - Can you think of children's rights? o What do you think about children's rights?
Question Block 2: **School Concept** **Sub question a):** How are the Children's Rights Convention Articles 3, 12, 29 and 31 implemented in the programs and policies of the "Children's Rights School" and the "Democratic School"?		o What is a typical school day like for you at this school? o What are the offers or fixed structures (e.g. morning circle, school assembly, courses, etc.)?	o Do you remember someone from UNICEF being here? - How was that for you? o Do you remember a particular day/action that you did on the topic of children's rights? o What was that like for you?

Appendix 3: Interview & Focus Group Questions

Question Block 3a:
Right to be heard

Sub question a): How is the Children's Rights Convention Article 12 implemented in the programs and policies of the "Children's Rights School" and the "Democratic School"?

Sub question b): What are the general difficulties in the process of implementing the Children's Rights Convention and what are specific difficulties in implementing Article 12? Where do the school community members see room for improvement in the implementation of this right?

Sub question c): Does the implementation of the Children's Rights Convention Article 12 create tensions in the educational practice?

There is, for example, the right to co-determination. This means that your opinion is important, and adults must listen. Whenever possible, they must take your opinion into account in decisions.

o Do the adults at school listen when you speak your mind?

o Can children have a say here at school? How?

o There is XY here, what do you think about that? Why?

o Why do you think there is XY?

o Would you like to have more say? (e.g. what is learned in class, what the classrooms look like, where to go on a class trip)?
- If so, where would you like to have more say?

o Do you have any ideas on how the school can make it even better so that the children can have a say?

Appendix 3: Interview & Focus Group Questions

Question Block 3b: **Right to Rest, Leisure & Play** **Sub question a):** How is the Children's Rights Convention Article 31 implemented in the programs and policies of the "Children's Rights School" and the "Democratic School"? **Sub question b):** What are the general difficulties in the process of implementing the Children's Rights Convention and what are specific difficulties in implementing Article 31? Where do the school community members see room for improvement in the implementation of this right? **Sub question c):** Does the implementation of the Children's Rights Convention Article 31 create tensions in the educational practice?	○ How many breaks do you have here at school? Do you think that is enough? ○ Is there enough time to play during the breaks? ○ What do you do after school? Do you think you have enough time to play and relax? ○ How do you feel with the amount of homework and studying you have to do? ○ There is XY here, what do you think about that? Why? ○ Do you wish you had more time to play and relax? ○ What can the school do better so that you can play and rest enough?		

Appendix 3: Interview & Focus Group Questions

Question Block 3c: **In the Best Interest of the Child** **Sub question a):** How is the Children's Rights Convention Article 3 implemented in the programs and policies of the "Children's Rights School" and the "Democratic School"? **Sub question b):** What are the general difficulties in the process of implementing the Children's Rights Convention and what are specific difficulties in implementing Article 3? Where do the school community members see room for improvement in the implementation of this right? **Sub question c):** Does the implementation of the Children's Rights Convention Article 3 create tensions in the educational practice?	o Do you think that when the adults at school make a decision (for example, what to do in class), they also look at what would be best for you children? o Do you think adults want what is best for you? o Who knows what is best for children? The Children themselves or adults?		

Appendix 3: Interview & Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions			
Questions	**Both**	**DS**	**UCRS**
Introductory Question	o When you hear the word children's rights, what comes to your mind first? (ROUND)		
Transition Question **Sub question a):** How are the Children's Rights Convention Articles 3, 12, 29 and 31 implemented in the programs and policies of the "Children's Rights School" and the "Democratic School"? **Sub question b):** What motivates the school community members to practise children's rights at school? What are the general difficulties in the process of implementing the Children's Rights Convention and what are specific difficulties in implementing Articles 3, 12, 20 and 31?		o How do you experience everyday school life in comparison to other schools or your own school biography? (With regard to children's rights) o Which concept aspects do you consider particularly valuable? Why?	o Do you experience any changes at the school since the UNICEF training? Where? How? o Which aspects / established structures at the school are you particularly proud of? Or: Which do you consider to be particularly valuable? - Why?
Key questions (approx. 10-15 minutes per question, maximum 3) **Sub question b):** Where do the school community members see room for improvement in the implementation of	o Where is there a need for improvement at your school in order to live children's rights even more in everyday school life? What resources are needed for this?		

Appendix 3: Interview & Focus Group Questions

these rights? **Sub question c):** Does the implementation of the Children's Rights Convention Articles 3,12, 29 and 31 create tensions in the educational practice?	o Imagine you go to sleep tonight and wake up 20 years in the future. It is an ideal future. What does your school look like in terms of children's rights? - Is it at all desirable that children's rights are respected at school? Why?		
Ending Questions **Opportunity for sub questions a), b), and c).**	o Is there anything we didn't talk about, but it is important? o What was the most important thing that came out of this conversation in the last hour for you? (ROUND) o Imagine you had a minute to talk to the Ministry of Education about the life of children's rights in schools, what would you tell her / him?		
Member Check Thank you.			