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# **Teachers' and Head Teachers' Views of Democratic Practices in Scottish Rights Respecting Secondary Schools**

Yong Shian Phoon

BSc the University of Hong Kong

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College of Social Sciences

University of Glasgow

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## **Abstract**

This research investigates how Scottish teachers and head teachers view democratic practices in their schools, which are the secondary schools who achieved the Level One Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA). These schools were targeted since the award required schools to teach and practice the United Nations Convention of Rights of the Child (UNCRC), where pupil voice should be respected and their participation valued. The implementation and initiation of the RRSA in these schools are described, together with what was perceived by teachers and head teachers as benefits, challenges and facilitating factors of implementing the RRSA in their schools. How they viewed democratic schools is also investigated to understand their motivation to improve pupil voice and participation. This information is analysed to examine how close these schools were to become a 'democratic school', which was defined as pupils' individual rights being upheld and having an equal share of responsibility in school management with adults.

This investigation involves four schools located in the Central Scotland area. School documents were collected together with interview responses from thirteen teachers and three head teachers in semi-structured interviews. From the findings, it is discovered that children's rights were upheld to some extent in these schools and there was an increased share of pupils' responsibility in school management. These changes were brought from bottom-up forces consisted of teachers and pupils, when the RRSA was introduced from a top-down approach. However, such improvement was bounded by the constraints from the national policy and adults' judgement on pupils' maturity. These have a number of implications for educational practitioners in schools, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) which initiated the RRSA and policy makers, if children's rights and pupil participation are aimed to be upheld and improved respectively.

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## Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name \_\_\_\_\_

## List of Abbreviations

AifL	Assessment is for Learning
CfE	Curriculum for Excellence
EU	European Union
HGIOS	How Good is Our School
HMIe	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education
ICCS	International Civic and Citizenship Education Study
IDEN	International Democratic Education Network
IDEC	International Democratic Education Conference
LA1	Local Authority 1
LA2	Local Authority 2
LTS	Learning and Teaching Scotland
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
RME	Religious and moral education
RRSA	Rights Respecting School Award
SCCYP	Scottish Commissioner of Children and Young People
SERA	Scottish Educational Research Association
SIMD	Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
SMT	Senior Management Team
UK	United Kingdom
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Recent global trends in the field of education have seen the disintegration of centralised control of education starting from the national government to local authorities and finally to school communities (MacBeath & Moos, 2003; Pring, 2013; Ross, Munn, & Brown, 2007), together with an increased tendency of educational policies across many countries mentioning student-centred learning and personalised curriculum (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Lathrop, 2005). The emerging marketisation of education has also empowered parents to have school choice as consumers of education (Fielding & Moss, 2011). A question arises as to whether this power could be devolved to individual pupils for them to have individual choice in learning content and to influence the school environment.

In fact, these are already practices by some alternative schools which claim themselves as 'democratic schools'. In these schools, children have the freedom and autonomy to organise their time, for learning or playing (Greenberg, 1995; Gribble, 1999). These schools are 'democratic' not only in terms of respecting individual freedom but also allowing pupils to have a voice or a vote equally shared with adults over their school management including school rules and sanctions (Neill, 1968). However, not all 'democratic school' practitioners agree on using the word 'democracy' to describe their school. This raises questions as to how mainstream educational practitioners describe a 'democratic school' and how they view it. Hence, this research attempts to understand how teachers and head teachers define and perceive 'democratic schools'. In addition, to what extent mainstream schools could be 'democratic' and the barriers for them to become a 'democratic school' were investigated.

This research specifically targets Scottish secondary schools which have achieved the Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA), where pupils and teachers work together to practise and increase the awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in their schools. This investigation has uncovered a number of interesting findings on the implementation of the RRSA as well as school and classroom practices that were regarded as democratic. It has also identified the obstacles for schools being 'democratic' that are inherent in the mainstream educational system together with the problems concerning pupils as identified by teachers and head teachers. These have

important implications for schools as well as policy makers and for debates among academic scholars.

## **1.1 Rationale for the Research**

A study of how Pakistani school principals defined democratic education by (Davies, 1999) found that there were diverse responses, such as hobbies, discussions and forums organised in schools that were undertaken by the students. It would be interesting to see if similar responses would be given by teachers and head teachers in Scottish secondary schools. To my best knowledge, no similar empirical research has been done here. This is important to be understood clearly before pushing democratic practices more widely in mainstream schools to predict the potential challenges to such attempt. The reasons are explained below.

First of all, the misunderstanding of a ‘democratic school’ could be a barrier for schools to be more ‘democratic’ since teachers may have the misconception that a democratic school is where pupils ‘do whatever they want’ and resist such movement (Davies, 1999). Over-simplifying what a democratic school means may also pose a threat to the actualisation of a real ‘democratic school’. Hence in this research, how desirable a ‘democratic school’ is, what is expected of a ‘democratic school’ and how comfortable it is for teachers and head teachers to accept the notion ‘democratic school’ are probed together with their motivation in promoting democratic practices in schools. Concurrently, to what extent teachers and head teachers think they are supported by government policies in carrying out democratic practices will be described to evaluate the role of educational policies in promoting democratic practice and in achieving policy makers’ objectives. After having these understandings, policy makers can be more aware of the drawbacks, potential misunderstanding and over or under expectation of a ‘democratic school’ from teachers’ and head teachers’ perspective.

The main objective of this research is to investigate how teachers and head teachers understand, evaluate and carry out democratic practices in rights-respecting secondary schools in Scotland. It is also the aim of this research to inspire educators and policy makers to aim for schools to become ‘democratic schools’ as a long term goal and making this as one of the assessment criteria of school effectiveness. This would be a gradual process, where schools’ first goal is to increase pupil participation in school governance

and teaching (Maitles & Deuchar, 2006). It is my hope for Scottish schools to be a global exemplar in supporting the democratic school movement. This was further strengthened by the claim that democratic education is useful in many national contexts (Harber & Trafford, 1999). With greater individual students' freedom to pursue their learning and opportunities in taking responsibility in school governance in democratic school environments, Scotland could have the potential to give birth to excellent citizens for many generations to come.

## **1.2 Personal Motivation for the Research**

This section explains my motivation in conducting this study through a biographical approach, from the origins of my determination to what I am trying to achieve as an MPhil student in the University of Glasgow. This is important to position myself within the study and make it transparent for any potential bias that may arise since this research involves qualitative study and is therefore subject to my interpretation.

I grew up in Malaysia and studied abroad in various cities for tertiary education, such as Hong Kong, Canberra, Cambridge and finally Glasgow. I remember I had the ambition to contribute in education when I was still in my bachelor degree. This was because I felt I was very lucky to have the opportunity to receive good quality education and felt amazed by my journey to become an independent and autonomous adult who can think for myself and be critical of the social norms. This has always left me wondering why our educational system only permitted these thinking skills in higher education but not in the earlier schooling life. My ambition at that time was to be a teacher who encourages critical thinking and self-determination. However, I also recognised my potential obstacles to such ambition, since I could be overloaded with the responsibility of teaching the national curriculum in the classroom and constrained by the limited informal contact with students, who are constantly being trained as examination machines in schools.

However my course changed and I felt enlightened when I discovered democratic education and Neill's philosophy, where autonomy and self-determination were given to children from a young age (Neill, 1968). I was first sceptical of such school ideals and my curiosity has brought me to delve deeply into the workings of democratic schools, and I was finally convinced by their logic and philosophy of educating the next generation. I felt that I should contribute to this field as I felt that their dedication to children's freedom and autonomy is a noble mission and that education should be aspiring to this model of

education. Hence, stepping into the University of Glasgow, I hope to contribute, however little and insignificant, to discover ways and barriers to move current educational systems towards alternative democratic education. At the same time, I also realised that I had a lot more to learn since I was confined to my own East Asian-style of education and had little knowledge about Western education. From my observation of Scottish pupils on the street, I discovered that students' appearance was not strictly controlled when compared to my own school, where going out of school grounds during recess time, make-up, dyed hair and long hair were strictly prohibited. I supposed there would be something more than that that could be discovered in my investigation in Scottish schools.

Coming from this background, my attempt to empathise with the participants of this study and criticisms of the Scottish educational system may be questioned. This is because before now I have never been either a student in Scotland or a teacher in my home country so I may not understand the experience and challenges of daily and long term teaching and learning in Scottish educational system. Hence, I could imagine that this research journey would definitely open my eyes not only to an educational system which is unfamiliar to me but also to teachers' and head teachers' perspective of schooling.

### **1.3 Research Aims and Questions**

With a number of objectives in mind, this research aims to investigate how a 'democratic school' is conceptualised by teachers and head teachers in mainstream schools. In this process, whether it is viewed positively or negatively will be uncovered, together with their motivation in pushing their schools to become more 'democratic'. Other than that, their school practices as discussed by them and revealed in documents are being evaluated to understand to what extent they are 'democratic' and the obstacles and facilitating factors for them to promote 'democracy' in their schools.

Hence, with these research aims, three main research questions are generated which this research will attempt to answer. They are listed as below,

- To what extent do Scottish rights-respecting secondary schools have the features of a 'democratic school'?
- What are the teachers and head teachers' perceptions of a 'democratic school' and to what extent are they aiming to provide a 'democratic' education?

- What are the facilitating factors and obstacles for mainstream schools seeking more democratic approaches to education?

Preliminary interviews were done with three directors of alternative democratic schools prior to collecting data in Scottish secondary schools. Their responses have uncovered a number of interesting findings on what these senior figures in the global democratic education movement perceived as challenges and benefits of democratic schools. For a better understanding on the influence of national policy on the educational system, the focus of this research shifted from the alternative model of education to mainstream schools so that the results of this research could be transferable to majority schools. However unfair it might be for mainstream schools to be compared to the alternative schools, it would nevertheless be useful to reflect on the current state of mainstream education to be investigated in this research. This could illuminate a direction for improving mainstream schools as supported by Fielding (2007), that conceptualization of alternatives for education is important for progressive education.

## **1.4 Structure of the Dissertation**

Chapter 1 has provided a brief introduction to this dissertation and the rationale for this research. This was followed by my reflexive account on my personal motivation for the research to illustrate my position in this research. After that, with the objective of filling in the research gap of teachers and head teachers' views on democratic practices in schools, the research aims were stated and three research questions were formed as a result. Finally, each chapter is briefly introduced to inform what this research is about.

Chapter 2 is the literature review of democratic education and the context of this research. It attempts to build a whole picture of the concept of democratic education available in the literature from academic theorists' and education practitioners' point of view before synthesising the definition of democratic education used throughout this dissertation. Since the definition of a democratic school has included respect for individual rights and an equal share of responsibility in school management, Scottish secondary schools which have implemented the RRSA were targeted since these schools were practicing and upholding UNCRC in their school and classrooms. This selection of schools is to understand how Scottish mainstream schools, which have dedicated themselves to

improve pupils' rights through the RRSA, could potentially lead to a more democratic school environment. Hence, the second part of the literature review presents the debates around the RRSA and the current state of Scottish education to gain an understanding of the research context.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in this research. As mentioned previously, this study targeted Scottish rights-respecting secondary schools, their teachers and head teachers. Hence, how the schools and the participants were recruited will be explained in this chapter. This is followed by a description of how empirical data was collected through semi-structured interviews and documents collected together with the explanation of the rationale of using these methods. Then, how data was analysed follows, together with the methodological limitations and ethical issues of this research.

Chapter 4 presents the main findings from the interviews and documents. It first reports the background of the schools, and then illustrates how teachers and head teachers viewed the RRSA implementation and democratic schools.

Chapter 5 discusses the main findings and their significance to the academic debates, educational practices and national policies. The discussion highlights the possibilities and limitations posed by national examinations, the conception of pupils' maturity and schools as educational providers in promoting democratic practices in schools.

Chapter 6 concludes the research by first stating how each research question is answered and what has been achieved personally, followed by a summary and discussion of the findings. Then, the implications of this research for policy makers, schools and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are discussed. Finally, the limitations and contribution of this research are explained and future research is also suggested. This dissertation ends with my final words which highlight my personal message from this research.

## **1.5 Summary**

This chapter has introduced this dissertation by explaining the context, rationale and motivation of the research. These are important to clarify why this research is necessary and the values that are important to me such as self-determination and autonomy. This is to effectively position myself in the research. These were followed by research

aims and questions that guide the direction of the research and will be explored again at the end of this dissertation. In short, this research explores 'democratic practices' in Scottish rights-respecting secondary school, the motivation of teachers and head teachers in practicing and promoting 'democratic school' and what the facilitating factors and challenges are for the schools to be 'democratic'. Finally, each chapter was briefly introduced as the structure of this dissertation in the last section to orientate the readers. The following chapter reviews academic writings on the concepts and the context involved in this research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

With the rise of a global educational trend in student-centred learning (Baumfield, Hulme, Livingston, & Menter, 2010; Dimmock & Walker, 2005) and the need for democratic citizenship education, democratic schools are gaining more and more popularity among academic scholars and educational practitioners. Many of them have generally advocated for more democracy in schools due to the pressing need to improve or to replace current educational practices. Therefore, there is a rich literature on theories and concepts of democratic education, covering illustrations of democratic practices, their benefits and potential challenges. Hence, this chapter first discusses the definition of democracy and democratic education among academic scholars and practitioners. This will bring out the definition I intend to use throughout this research. Then, the features of democratic schools are described using three different models of alternative democratic schools. These are followed by the benefits and challenges for mainstream schools to become democratic in general.

Since this research is an empirical study, a description of context is necessary and is included in the later part of the literature review. The discussion hence moves on from concept to context to elucidate the current trends of Scottish educational policies that could support democracy in schools together with the criticisms they received. Among the Scottish schools, those which had achieved the Level One RRSA were selected since these schools were actively involved in practicing the UNCRC, an important element of a democratic school. The RRSA programme is described together with the evaluation on how it could promote and limit democracy in schools, before explaining the methodology used in the next chapter.

### **2.1 The Concept**

This section describes the concept of democratic schools. Before laying out the definitions of a democratic school, the concept of democracy is first explained to understand why democracy is not only about power structures but also ‘an associated way of living’ (Dewey, 1903, p. 87).

### 2.1.1 Democracy

The word ‘democracy’ itself contains a complex meaning, starting with Oxford dictionary’s simplistic definition as ‘a system of government by the whole population or all the eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives’ (Oxford Dictionary, 2010). This is generally known for a country that runs a state government with an elected head of government. Certainly, as implied above, the usage of the word ‘democracy’ departs from political context to what Dewey is famously quoted that democracy is ‘more than a form of government’ (Dewey, 1903, p. 87). In fact, Dewey’s features of democracy include ‘step-by-step democracy, associated democracy, tolerant democracy and pragmatism’ (Hoyt, 2006, p. 13). Davies (1999, p. 128) has thence acknowledged that ‘democracy is not a single definable entity but the broad term for a set of political processes towards the ends of justice, prosperity and peace’, which includes the socially desirable effect of democracy into the definition. Various scholars and organizations such as Freedom House have broken down democracy into several concepts, emphasising equality, freedom and control, which encompass the values of government by consent, pluralism, diversity, tolerance, rule of law, respect and rights (Campbell, 2008). Given the complexity of defining democracy, Hughes (1951, p. 12) nevertheless pointed out that ‘[t]he impossibility of defining democracy is beside the mark, for though it is indefinable it is understandable, and not only by philosophers but by ordinary people’ so that lay people can achieve social justice in the name of democracy despite the fact that democracy is difficult to be defined (as quoted in Killen, 2012, p. 4). However ill-defined democracy is, there must be certain set of interpretation to the concept to make it meaningful and a common language for everyone as suggested by Davies (1995).

On a smaller scale, the term ‘democracy’ is also used by various organizations or companies to describe their management system, where power is decentralised and originated from workers who participate in the decision making of a company including the election of their manager (Malone, 2004). However, when the term ‘democracy’ is used on institutions like schools or on an abstract concept like education, a different meaning may occur when they are discussed by the scholars, policy makers or educational practitioners with reference to their own educational agenda. Hence, how a ‘democratic school’ is understood by different education stakeholders is described below.

## 2.1.2 Democratic Schools

This section proceeds to the discussion of the definition of a democratic school from academic scholars' and educational practitioners' points of view. The definition of a democratic school used throughout this study is then synthesised, with the recognition that such a concept occurs on a continuum such that schools can be more or less democratic or authoritarian.

### 2.1.2.1 Definitions by Academic Scholars

The definition of a democratic school varies among academic scholars depending on the issues they are discussing. In many instances, democratic schools were referred to as schools that provide good quality education that is equally accessible for all students. Schools were also regarded as a site to educate the next generation for democracy such that democratic values should be instilled through practices or teaching in a democratic school. Other than that, curriculum could be democratic such that the public or the learners decide what should be learnt, and that all kinds of knowledge should be treated equally instead of the privileged knowledge set by policy makers in the national curriculum. Throughout the discussion below and the next section, the four basic principles of democracy, which are rights, equity, participation and informed choice proposed by Davies, Harber & Schweisfurth (2002) will be made reference to.

The equal accessibility of good quality education to everyone refers to the elimination of inequalities the education, which means opening up equal opportunity to formal education for all citizens, condemning tracking and all sorts of obstacles to inclusiveness (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Killen, 2012; Lee, 1999). The foremost view of democracy in education is particularly prominent in new independent and democratic nations, such as in Malaysia, where democratization of education means opening up chances of education to everyone, not only to the privileged elites established by colonial powers (Lee, 1999). This is also referred to as increased school attainment in other literature (King & Lillard, 1987). The notion of giving equal access to formal education for all is thus a duty of democratic government to provide 'democratic education', and corresponds to the concept of 'equity' in Davies et al.'s (2002) four key concepts of democracy.

However, the quality of education experienced by citizens from different socio-economic background may not be equal due to privatisation of education, which gives rise to fee-paying schools. In this case, some forms of education, extra lessons and summer school programmes are only affordable to the privileged few (Gordon, Bridglall, & Meroe, 2005). This situation is regarded as not democratic as the advantaged population is more likely to achieve better academic results due to extra opportunities (Saltman, 2007). This is worsened when teachers form low expectations towards low-achieving students who have generally a low-socioeconomic level and are clustered into the same classroom due to tracking system (Slavin & Davis, 2006). They were reported to have been assigned less challenging tasks and opportunities for them to learn (Slavin & Davis, 2006). This unequal treatment, or undemocratic educational practice could have an adverse impact on social mobility since it was perceived that having high quality of education is the way to improve the quality of life of the disadvantaged population and to get them out of the vicious cycle of poverty (Killen, 2012). Hence, scholars and policy makers are trying their best to promote social equality and democratising education by improving the equality of education and by preventing privatisation of education (MacBeath, 2013).

Other scholars may refer to a democratic school as a site for educating the next generation for a democratic society. The methods include teaching democratic values via classroom lessons or acquisition of democratic values through pupil participation in school governance and enterprising to cultivate active citizens, which is related to the concept of 'participation' in Davies et al.'s (2002) framework of democracy. Instilling democratic values among pupils is regarded as an important goal of modern education, as advocated by Fielding & Moss (2011) and Apple & Beane (1995). In accordance with this, Gutmann (1999, p. 289) has set out the role of democratic education as to 'suppl[y] the foundations upon which a democratic society can secure the civil and political freedoms of its adult citizens without placing their welfare or its very survival at great risk'. To achieve such an aim, Deuchar (2009) proposed three vehicles for a democratic school, which are pupil council, classroom decision making and discussion of controversial topics which include both global issues and issues raised in pupil council. Korkmaz & Gümüşeli (2013) on the other hand, developed a scale to measure the democratic classroom environment by measuring teachers' perceptions of the characteristics of democratic education, which are grouped into four categories, namely decision-making/participation, curriculum-instruction, classroom relationship and teachers' role. In their description of a democratic environment, they included John Dewey's concepts of democratic education in relation to personal development and wider society.

Instead of focusing on supporting the current structure of a democratic nation, some scholars advocate schooling as a site for prefigurative democracy. To Fielding (2007), schooling should not only be a form of education for democracy but also in democracy. This is also supported by Carr & Hartnett's (1996) notion that education should be a part of social process in a democratic society that perpetuates the change of values through educational policies. According to them, the ideal type of democracy is cultured in schools through instillation of democratic values prioritised in educational policies, which gradually lead to change in the structure of a democratic nation. This process is known as 'long revolution' as it involves a long period of time from policy implementation to observation of its effect (Carr & Hartnett, 1996). McCowan (2010) further links education to fostering social transformation by taking two social change movements in Brazil, which are the Plural School movement and the Landless movement. Education has played a very important role in these two movements as it taught the next generation to live and function in a democratic society and fight for radical democracy.

Fielding & Moss (2011) further advocated for radical education that regards democracy as its fundamental value, focuses on collective curriculum, decision making and engagement in wider community. More radically and in relation to the educational system, Levinson (2011) suggested that democratic education should be linked with common educational goals, transparency of curriculum and school effectiveness. From the other perspective, Apple & Beane (1995) explained the need for a democratic curriculum in schools so that all kinds of knowledge, from arts, social studies and humanities to science, business and technology, would be equally exposed to students and taught by teachers instead of being dominated by the selected few knowledge types stipulated by policy makers (Fan, 2002; Fendler, 2012; Fielding & Moss, 2011). Bringing Davies et al.'s (2002) framework into the discussion, the equal status of knowledge is linked to the concept of 'equity'.

These descriptions of a democratic school have addressed many important issues in education, from equal opportunity to good quality education, to the instillation of democratic values and democratic curriculum. Some of these descriptions of a democratic school overlap to some extent with the definition of a democratic school I intend to use in this research but as described below, my definition of a democratic school takes alternative democratic schools as models. It further illustrates the other two key concepts proposed by Davies et al. (2002) which are less prominent in the discussion above, which are 'rights' and 'informed choice'.

### *2.1.2.2 Definition Used in this Research*

The definition of a democratic school used here is highly influenced by alternative democratic schools, many of which are brought together by the International Democratic Education Network (IDEN). At the International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC) in New Zealand organised by one of the democratic schools in 2002, a definition of democratic education was attempted such that '[t]he diverse participants in Democratic Education are united in upholding the spirit of the Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and implementing this as the primary framework for the day-to-day practices in all learning environments' (IDEN, 2012). Three years later in Berlin, the participants reached a consensus that democratic education is where students have the responsibility to take charge of how, when, what, where and with whom to learn and where students and teachers share equal participation in their school governance and behavioural sanctions (IDEC, 2005). To the self-proclaimed democratic schools such as Summerhill, democratic practices were regarded by their principal as the shared decision making of students in the running of the school (Neill, 1968). Synthesising these definitions, the definition used in this research involves two concepts, namely respect for individual rights using the UNCRC as guidance and equal share of responsibility in school management.

Respect for individual rights includes non-discrimination, freedom and respect for diversity, which are all implied in the UNCRC and similar to the rights owned by a democratic nation's citizens. As stated in the UNCRC, the views of a child should be respected and taken into account when making decisions that influence them (UNICEF, 2012). A democratic school should share the responsibility of running the school with the children, including behavioural management. Each person's, including pupils', teachers', head teachers' and parents' voices should carry equal weight, either through consensus or voting. Other than that, in relation to rights to education, children should be able to decide 'how, when, what, where and with whom to learn' in a democratic school (IDEN, 2012). This recognises children as autonomous beings who can take responsibility in their own learning. In short, the four basic values of democracy developed by Davies et al. (2002) are addressed in this definition. This is because 'rights' are respected, 'equity' of children and adults are emphasised, children's 'participation' in school management is taken into account and finally children have 'informed choice' in school management.

There are a number of values and characteristics entailed with this definition, from school organisation to improved relationships between pupils and teachers, as described extensively by Lathrop (2005). These will be described in the section below. It is acknowledged that this definition does not include all the descriptions of democratic schools by all scholars since it focuses on individual freedom and power structures in the schools instead of looking at the state of the educational system as a whole. Nevertheless, democratic schools as a site for instillation of democratic values and democracy in curriculum will be addressed throughout this dissertation.

### *2.1.2.3 Features of a Democratic School*

There are a number of features of a democratic school derived from this definition of a democratic school. They will be described using alternative democratic schools to understand how respect for individual rights and equal share of responsibility for school management are upheld in these schools using three prominent examples of democratic schools, namely Summerhill, Sands School and Sudbury Valley School. These are the schools on the extreme end of the democratic schooling continuum. First of all, the structure of the schools will be described in terms of school meetings, behavioural management and responsibilities held by pupils. This is followed by a description of their classrooms in terms of organisation and learning content.

One common feature of the three alternative schools is school meetings, where all pupils and adults discuss and decide issues in the school. One important issue being discussed in these schools is school rules, where anyone could raise issues around them or propose amendments to them (Gribble, 1999). Each participant, regardless of whether they are students or teachers, was allowed to voice out their concern and each had one equal vote over the issues, if the issues do not reach a consensus. As reported by Neill (1968), the collective power of students in Summerhill could be greater than that of the principal since the number of students was greater such that the principal's proposal could be vetoed by the students. This was a characteristic of Summerhill that its principal, Neill was proud of and he reported a few instances where his proposals were rejected by the school meetings. Other than school rules, Summerhill and Sands School discuss the breach of school rules in school meetings (Gribble, 1999). Sanctions are given collectively considering each person, including the offender's point of view. In Sudbury Valley School, a special committee

made up of students are responsible to carry out the investigation of the breach of school laws and subsequently bring the offenders into a school court (Greenberg, 1995). Students in these three schools are also responsible in organising events in the schools and the maintenance of the classrooms. Hence, from the description above, students and teachers share equal responsibility in setting up the school rules and managing the students' behaviour through upholding the school rules. Rights are upheld since students have the rights to express themselves and have their views taken into account in school meetings.

In some self-proclaimed democratic schools, such as Summerhill, classes are optional and students have the freedom to choose their activities in schools (Neill, 1968). In Sands School, students decide in the school meeting each year to have compulsory classes despite the many complaints from those who oppose it while no lesson is organised in Sudbury Valley School unless students requested one (Gribble, 1999). As reported by Greenberg (1995), students in Sudbury Valley School do not usually study at school but at home as school is a place for socializing with peers and teachers. Hence, students in these schools have the freedom and autonomy in deciding their learning content, instead of an imposed curriculum from a teacher or from the national policy. Rights to education and rights to play and relaxation are upheld in these schools.

Nevertheless, Neill, the principal was criticized for some of his undemocratic practices such as his absolute control over staff appointments, bedroom arrangements and the prohibition of using dangerous weapons, although these measures were not without their rationale, for the sake of the children's safety and freeing children from tedious administrative work (Darling, 1992; Neill, 1968). In fact, Neill of Summerhill often worried about the safety hazards of the boarders due to the freedom given to them, which in Stronach & Piper's (2008) opinion, that 'it is not safe to be free'. However, these schools continue to operate with this extent of freedom despite the danger. Questions must be raised as to why these schools insist to be democratic despite the many challenges of sustaining themselves.

#### *2.1.2.4 Why Democratic School?*

There are a number of reasons for the three example schools above to remain democratic as well as for why academic scholars are urging schools to be democratic. The main arguments for democratic schools could be categorised into intrinsic values or

instrumental values (McCowan, 2011). The former relates to pupils having the intrinsic rights to participate in school management and to be happy while the latter is related to the fact that democratic schools have brought a number of benefits to school as well as to the individual pupils due to a more positive relationship and better interpersonal skills.

Practitioners in democratic schools have produced a number of publications that describe the characteristics of democratic school students and graduates. They explained that, as a result of an equal relationship between students and teachers, democratic school students and graduates are more mature and confident when speaking to adults or their superiors, when comparing them to mainstream school students in colleges and universities (Gray & Chanoff, 1986). Other than that, students are reported to be more tolerant and caring as a result of increased social interactions and inclusiveness within the schools, where students are more exposed to diverse personalities and opinions in school meetings (Gribble, 1999). Hence, it is not surprising for Gray & Chanoff (1986) to discover that a large proportion of Sudbury Valley School graduates took up caring professions such as nurses and teachers. Other than that, a study on the Sudbury Valley School graduates' careers and further education generally viewed them as successful and the graduates' personal background was regarded not as a major explanation for their success (Gray & Chanoff, 1986).

Similar students' characteristics were reported in mainstream schools where pupils could participate in school governance or in self-organised activities (Maitles & Deuchar, 2006; Peacock, 2005; Whitty & Wisby, 2007). Students in such schools were also reported to have improved friendship, self-esteem and well-being, accompanied by decreased depression, social anxiety, substance abuse, bullying and delinquency among adolescents (Bohnert, Fredricks, & Randall, 2010; Saha & Print, 2010). Increased pupil participation was also beneficial for the school ethos as students and teachers gained a sense of belonging in the school, which in turn promoted young people's, especially adolescents', morale, trust and pro-social behaviour (Peacock, 2005; Saha & Print, 2010; Vieno, Perkins, Smith, & Santinello, 2005; Whitty & Wisby, 2007). The logic behind these was explained such that 'democratic skills and dispositions such as negotiation, compromise, awareness of the impact of conflict on the overall wellbeing of the community and the environment, [can bring about the] development of well-informed respect for differences between people' (Biesta, 2008, p. 44; Maitles & Deuchar, 2006). These also brought about improved academic performance and school attendance, as shown in a meta-analysis and supported

by the argument that pupils with greater empowerment of rights and responsibility engage more readily with schools (Bohnert, et al., 2010).

Other than that, involvement of students in school management also trains their leadership skills and sense of responsibility. This is particularly so in alternative democratic schools since various soft skills such as empathy, analytical skills and critical thinking are required in school meetings during decision making, when making school laws or when judging a peer (Greenberg, 1995; Gribble, 1999). Neill of Summerhill also reported that peer punishments in school meetings were always lenient and rational, sometimes having creative and effective solutions that adults could hardly think of, such as rewarding the offender for breaching the school rules (Engel, 1999; McCluskey et al., 2012; Neill, 1968). It was reported to be effective since the offender would reject such a reward and would not misbehave again. Nevertheless, there was a report of an unresolved case where a girl was reported to keep bullying younger students and the school meeting did not effectively resolve the problem (Neill, 1968). Pupils' creativity was also reported to manifest itself in mainstream schools which have democratic practices in problem solving and behavioural management. For instance, Rowe (1999) reported that primary school students identified places with high bullying incidences instead of identifying students who bully, and had the bullying incidence decreased with a greater supervision in that area (Alderson, 2008).

These are also supported by the evidence produced in research on pupil participation, where pupils agreed that transferable skills such as interpersonal and organisational skills were developed when pupil voice had been well promoted (Maitles & Deuchar, 2006; Whitty & Wisby, 2007). These scholars also argued that transferable empowerment can continue from young people to adulthood when they face a wider society. This is strengthened with the perception that young people connected with charity organisations gain social capital from pupil participation for further participation in community service (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007). Although pupils participate in mainstream school governance through representatives in pupil councils instead of school meetings due to large pupil numbers (Trafford, 1997), it was argued that through these measures the schools could at least increase pupil voice or participation in school governance so that students would be able to obtain social capital for political involvement in the future, gaining a habit of voting and experience in how a social system is constructed (Leighton, 2006; Saha & Print, 2010). It was also suggested to have provided valuable

learning experience about democracy through voting in an election and a representative system unlike school meetings in alternative democratic schools (Saha & Print, 2010).

Nevertheless, this raises counterarguments that question if the skills gained from democratic participation in the schools are readily applied in later life. This is because democratic participation in schools does not necessarily entail successful transformation into the wider society. For example, members of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), who can be regarded as active citizens, attributed their social transformative nature to personal attributes rather than to schooling experience (Kane, 2013). Hence, in the face of this criticism, the intrinsic value of democratic participation in schools is perhaps a better argument for why democratic schools. Moreover, the three example schools above based their rationale for their practices on their underlying philosophy and some educational concepts, rather than purely for the desirable effects.

McCowan (2010) argued strongly that children have intrinsic rights to influence the decisions around them, since they are citizens. The fact that a democratic school allows them to have such voice is what adults should do. Other than that, students' individual rights are upheld in a democratic school for them to pursue their individuality and focus on working for their interests in the school, which may include chemistry, mathematics, fishing, pottery, drama, photography and carpentry, without coercion from teachers or national examinations and curricula (Gribble, 1999; Lathrop, 2005; Neill, 1968). This was what some educators would point to as a 'holistic education' or democratic curriculum as it liberates students from alienation of their knowledge and the suppression of creativity in school (Saito, 2000).

Additionally, students in democratic schools have the opportunity to develop their talents with sufficient time since the responsibility of time allocation is devolved to individual students. Thus, Lathrop (2005) argued that democratic learning pushes the curriculum to be more student-centred and personalised, so that students' choice and freedom are paid greater attention. This has also allowed flexibility for different speed of growth for each child with different mixtures of ability, respecting students' diversity instead of regarding it as a burden in a one-size-fits-all lesson in a single classroom (Robinson, 2009; Slavin & Davis, 2006). Moreover, it was further pointed out that greater students responsibility in learning also increases students' concern over their learning conditions, which feeds greater students voice in school governance (Darling, 1992).

Having understood the concept of a democratic school as well as the rationale to promote it in mainstream education, the context of this research will be brought into view in the next section to understand how far away mainstream education is from being democratic and the obstacles for mainstream schools being democratic.

## **2.2 The Context**

This section describes the context of this research and the debates around mainstream education. How the current structure of mainstream education contrasts itself from democratic schools is first described, followed by its obstacles and the possibilities to be more democratic. Since this research took place in Scotland and specifically targeted rights-respecting schools, Scottish educational policies and the RRSA programme will be described and their criticisms will be discussed to understand their strengths and limitations in promoting rights and equality in schools.

### **2.2.1 The Current State of Mainstream Education**

The structure of mainstream education is here described from the teacher-student relationship in a classroom setting, through the organisation of school to the impact of the national curriculum on schools. These will uncover a series of limitations of mainstream schools in providing quality education. This will be followed by a discussion of the obstacles for these schools to become more democratic in the sub-section.

In the discussion of democratic schools or issues around mainstream schools, the latter have often been critiqued for being ill-fitted to a democratic society (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991) and for not being student-centred, conflicting with various prominent educational theories such as those of Piaget & Cook (1952), where students were suggested to learn by discovery, instead of banking of knowledge<sup>1</sup>. Hence, mainstream education has often been criticised to be producing students who are generally passive, unmotivated and bored, due to the feelings of being ‘owned’ by knowledge since school is knowledge-centred (Fendler, 2012). This has been blamed for the students’ lack of engagement with school, which has also led to behavioural problems, in classrooms as well as outside the

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<sup>1</sup>A term used by Freire (2000) to describe the act of teacher inscribing knowledge onto students’ mind.

schools (Luiselli, Putnam, Handler, & Feinberg, 2005). Teachers would be regarded by Swatz (1974) as entertainers if they tried to use different kinds of methods to keep students attracted and occupied in classrooms. He further pointed to this being a result of students' responsibility in learning being taken away by teachers. This is also supported by the argument that students and teachers are often unsatisfied with their niche at schools (Lees, 2010). Adding to teachers' dissatisfaction, teachers have also been described to have suffered from adversity of daily teaching due to emotional workload and the unpredictability of disruptions that could happen in the classrooms (Gu & Day, 2007).

This classroom relationship was worsened with the rigidity of school structures such as tracking and stratifying students according to their age in some mainstream educational systems. For example, some scholars suggest that students' every stage of development should be achievable with an adequate amount of time (Carroll, 1963; Slavin & Davis, 2006), but it is not tolerated in some mainstream schools since the advancement of grades is age-dependent (Hamilton & Brown, 2005). Hence, some students who are slow on progression could be left out if the situation is not remedied as the learning content became harder. Furthermore, as discussed previously, the tracking system used to minimize student diversity in mainstream classrooms is an undemocratic practice since it excludes students from quality education due to stigmatization and low expectation from teachers of the low-performing students (Slavin & Davis, 2006). However, mixing students with different abilities would minimise the problem of stigmatisation but it could increase student diversity in classrooms, which would in turn pose problems for teachers to select appropriate teaching materials for the classroom.

Ultimately, tracking and students' fixed progression in schools are to fit a national picture of education in some countries. Students in some of the mainstream schooling systems are tested against an arbitrary set of national standards at some point during their schooling. They are required to follow the progress of the national curriculum and sit for national examinations as stated in national educational policies (Hamilton & Brown, 2005). This emphasis on the attainment agenda is apparent in the United States where teachers can face severe consequences if students' academic achievements are not satisfactory. Under governmental pressure on teachers' accountability, teachers have suffered from a heavy burden to help students perform well in high stakes exit examinations (Holme, Richards, Jimerson, & Cohen, 2010). As a consequence, Plank & Condliffe (2013) reported that American teachers appeared to be providing less emotional and instructional support when they were preparing students for national examinations, which are undemocratic and less

student-centred. Furthermore, schools were found making false report of their students' progress while encouraging students to drop out or retaining students in the same grade so that the schools would achieve a better result in high school exit examinations (Holme, et al., 2010).

Moreover, a fixed national curriculum present in some educational systems tends to homogenise student diversity by limiting the scope of knowledge and progression. This might limit the gifted students' progression or talents of a more specific knowledge such as aerodynamics (Gribble, 2014; Hayward, 2007). Furthermore, students' emotional and social development is not tested in national examinations, which might be side-lined when schools are pressured for good academic performance. Harber (2004) thus argues that effective schooling should not only focus on academic excellence as the only indicator since a narrow sense of educating a literate terrorist would also be then considered as a successful education. A high school principal who survived a concentration camp hence ultimately questioned the role of education in nurturing educated graduates but cruel and apathetic individuals who performed inhumane activities during World War II (Pring, 1984).

Nevertheless, there is evidence from all around the world that schools and nations have attempted to improve pupil voice for better quality citizenship education as well as an improvement to children's rights. The latter has stimulated youth political involvement in Norway and in New Zealand (Wyness, 1999). Many provinces in Canada have increased student participation in community service and in debates of controversial issues in the name of strengthening future democracy (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002; Sears & Hughes, 1996). In Australia, school councils were reported to have been established in schools and many benefits were reported (Saha & Print, 2010). In Turkish schools, Korkmaz & Gümüseli (2013) have tested the degree of democratic classrooms. These are the examples of how the global education reform has influenced policy-making as well as the direction of educational research. Despite the efforts from academic scholars and policy makers, there are fundamental concepts about schooling and children that act as challenges for mainstream schools to become democratic other than the structural constraints. These issues will be discussed below.

#### *2.2.1.1 Obstacles for Schools to be more Democratic*

In spite of the many reasons for promoting democratic schooling and the many concerns for mainstream education described in the previous sections, the concept of democratic schools has failed to be accepted widely in practice (Gribble, 1999). One might begin to ask why democratic schools still remain as an alternative despite its 100-year history, particularly when scholars have pointed out that mainstream schools are only good at custom and tradition (Thomas, 2013). In fact, as documented by Diamond, Harber & Meighan (1989), state-supported democratic schools established in England were closed down due to ‘unsound rationality’ that blamed children ‘to be unhelpful towards economy when they were free to make choice and when there was economic recession’ (p. 78). Indeed, democratic school practitioners have often based their practice from their underlying philosophy of education and beliefs about children.

Many would be surprised at the freedom provided by these schools to the students and wondered if students would ever learn in this environment without coercion. Counterintuitively, Sudbury Valley School graduates are characterised by a love of learning that helped them through their higher education (Gray & Chanoff, 1986). In a research study, students’ motivation to learning across different ages of schooling in democratic schools remained unchanged, as opposed to those of mainstream schools which decreased over years, although the former is not as good as those of homeschoolers, who reported to have increased motivation over the years (Berg & Corpus, 2013). Taken from this finding, it could be imagined that students from democratic schools have a lifetime interest in learning which matches the description of Gray & Chanoff (1986) on Sudbury Valley School graduates above. To go a step further, one could suggest that human beings can learn without being coerced, in accordance with the educational beliefs held by democratic schools and some other scholars (Ginnis, 1992; Neill, 1968).

Other than that, Summerhill has a rather distinctive philosophy that explains the rationale for the freedom given to the students. Neill, the principal of Summerhill, was more interested in ensuring that the children were happy and free from psychological constraints and burdens (Engel, 1999; Neill, 1968). This was because he was heavily influenced by Freud and Homer Lane’s Little Commonwealth, where the former attributed mental illnesses to unresolved wills while the latter believed in good nature in human beings (Bazeley, 1928). Hence, Neill carried a great mission of liberating children from their authoritative parents, making boarding compulsory and resolving suppressed egos of the students (Neill, 1968). Similarly, Gribble (1999), one of the founders of Sands School,

insisted that ‘children respect unless someone disrespect them, children love unless they are being unloved’(p.287), showing a deep trust in the children’s innately good nature.

The disparate beliefs between democratic and mainstream schools could be polarised when teachers and pupils are not seen as equal in mainstream schools while dichotomising adults and children (Ross, et al., 2007). Commentators have alleged that children in mainstream schools are also perceived to be incompetent and needed to be taught well before they could be trusted to be given full autonomy and participation in mainstream schools (Greenberg & Sadofsky, 1992; Lees, 2010; Rudduck & Flutter, 2000). This is worrying since the relation between competency for participation and competency gained from participation could be circular, such that ‘incompetent’ children could never gained competency since they are not allowed to participate (Ross, et al., 2007). Furthermore, Kohn (1993) gave a compelling argument that depriving children of responsibility in participation does not help them to become more mature.

In addition to that, some teachers regard devolving power to students as losing professionalism and exposed to the risk of students getting unruly and anarchistic in schools (Cross et al., 2009; Davies, et al., 2002). This power relation could also exist between a head teacher and teachers. An example can be taken from a detailed account of challenges faced by a head teacher who endeavoured to promote democratic practices in an independent school (Trafford, 1997). In the description, there was an instance where democracy was fragile when it involved a conflict of interest and an expectation of power. For instance, the head teacher had the thought to allow student participation in parents’ meetings straightaway without his usual procedure of democratic consultation with the teachers. This was because the parents were expecting him to perform his power as a head teacher in deciding this issue and the failure to do that would make him feel embarrassed. Moreover, Trafford (1997) reported that the student council in his school made demands which were unacceptable to the teachers such as allowing students to attend staff meetings. In such instances, pupils would often cast scepticism on democracy in school and experience frustration and helplessness when such demands were not met.

Other than the different underlying concepts of education held by the two different educational systems, there are structural challenges for democratic education in mainstream schools. First of all, the school size of the latter is usually very much larger than the former such that a whole school meeting is impossible (Hope, 2012). Other than that, as discussed above, mainstream schools are subjected to governmental accountability pressures on pupils’ performance and professional bodies such as teacher unions such that

their duties and responsibilities are bounded by rules and regulations on safety and pupils' freedom is restricted. Furthermore, the benefits of democratic school may not manifest themselves in mainstream schools since attending democratic schools is voluntary and fee-paying such that only affluent parents can afford that. Hence, the parents could have exhibited certain characteristics, such that there was less parental pressure in democratic schools than in mainstream schools. Indeed, Engel (1999) pointed out that the parents in Hadera Democratic School were from upper-middle class families who valued creativity, freedom and autonomy and so there is a strong element of self-selection.

Taking the many obstacles of mainstream schools in becoming more democratic, could democratic schooling ever exist in mainstream education? Before answering this question, a closer look at the national policy is required. As this research has focused on Scottish educational policy, it will be described in the next section.

### **2.2.2 Scottish Educational Policy**

This section briefly discusses features of Scottish educational policies, followed by the current state of democratic practices in schools and the criticisms of these policies. There are a number of agencies which have significant influence on the educational activities in the schools, such as the Scottish Government, local councils, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIe) and the Scottish Commissioner of Children and Young People (SCCYP). The Scottish Government publishes policy documents to regulate educational activities in the schools. Those which will be mentioned below are Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), How Good is our School (HGIOS), Assessment is for Learning (AifL) and Get it Right for Every Child (GIFREC). On the other hand, each of the 32 local councils established according to their geographical location in Scotland is responsible to allocate resources and funding to the schools (Humes, 2003). They are also responsible for schools' quality and setting up the direction of the schools. The schools are inspected by HMIe, which base the criteria of inspection on how well the schools are helping pupils to learn (Humes, 2003). Finally, the SCCYP is responsible in ensuring children's and young people's welfare, following the aspirations set up by the UNCRC (Paton & Munro, 2006). Their work is supported by GIFREC, which regulates schools on implementing the UNCRC.

CfE is the most recent and influential change in Scottish education, where the educational outcomes are stated as pupils becoming ‘Responsible Citizens’, ‘Effective Contributors’, ‘Successful Learners’ and ‘Confident individuals’, which match Scotland’s fourth national priority of citizenship (Scottish Executive, 2003; SEED, 2006). It aims to provide Education for Citizenship based on the rationale that the future generations need to be more responsible and to be active politically, in the moral panic of low turnout in general elections and participation in the European Union (EU) (Cowan & McMurtry, 2009; Ross, et al., 2007). The panic that adults have been irresponsible in politics was felt recently, signalling the need for a more comprehensive political life in childhood to prepare them for adult life (Biesta, 2010). Scottish educational policies thus encouraged a practical approach to teach citizenship education since they held the belief that teaching about democratic values is not as effective as students understanding how their participation can have an impact on their surroundings (Maitles & Deuchar, 2006). Hence, Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) (2002), now Education Scotland stated that ‘citizenship is best learnt through experience and interaction with others’ (p.10). This was also supported by International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), which found out that direct civic teaching did little to encourage students to be more active in political participation (Schulz, Fraillon, Ainley, Losito, & Kerr, 2009).

In accordance with that, the acquisition of democratic values through students’ active participation in school activities is then emphasised (Maitles & Deuchar, 2006; Pike, 2007). The intrinsic value of democratic education that young people should have a voice in their schools is also recognised in Scottish educational policy since pupils should be seen as ‘citizens now’ rather than ‘citizens in waiting’ (Biesta, 2008; Maitles & Gilchrist, 2005). These initiatives are coupled with a greater flexibility in curriculum as aimed to be provided by AifL. This is achieved by de-cluttering the curriculum to reduce teachers’ workload with the intention that teachers could have more time and freedom to design teaching content and classroom assessments to suit pupils’ learning and local needs (Baumfield, et al., 2010; Hutchinson & Hayward, 2005). The rationale of this policy is to increase pupils’ engagement in learning and teachers’ professionalism, with the possibility of pupils’ participation in curriculum development (Baumfield, et al., 2010). At the same time, school quality is assured with self-evaluation of the school using guidelines from HGIOS. Such flexibility allows schools to experiment with different innovations, moving the role of head teacher from being a manager to being a leader (MacBeath, 2013).

The Scottish government also took the initiative by enacting Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 (Scottish Executive, 2000), which states that every school in Scotland must consult pupils. This is also supported by the HMIe's call for a greater pupil voice to enhance their learning experience in schools (HMIe, 2006). Thus, Scottish pupils, from primary to secondary schools, have a chance to be consulted in pupil council and to participate in various school affairs such as staff appointment consultations, curriculum development and behavioural policies (Cross, et al., 2009). These initiatives that aim to increase pupil participation in school governance could potentially increase the momentum of schools becoming more democratic as pupils' capability of making rational decisions is gaining visibility (Ross, et al., 2007). Indeed, a report from the University of Glasgow has a fairly positive view towards pupil participation in Scottish schools as they were found to match the aims of CfE (Cross, et al., 2009). Schools also reported that a closer relationship was developed among students and teachers while peer mediation was used over disputes and primary school pupils took charge in fund raising (Cross, et al., 2009). Moreover, a small sample of Scottish secondary pupils showed a great interest and enthusiasm in acquiring various democratic values in action research on religious and moral education (RME) classes (Maitles & Gilchrist, 2005).

With the reports of improved pupil voice and participation in school governance as well as in classrooms, the Scottish educational system has the advantage in making democratic practices more widespread in mainstream schools and in setting democratic education as the education practitioners' common goal in the near future. Furthermore, Whitty & Wisby (2007) have summarised that pupil voice could be driven by school improvement, personalisation, children's rights and active citizenship. In the case of Scottish education, school improvement could be driven by flexibility for schools to innovate while using HGIOS as guidelines. Children's rights on the other hand are driven by the SCCYP and GIFREC while active citizenship is driven by CfE. This is further strengthened by the Scottish Government's endeavour to enforce the UNCRC more comprehensively by enforcing laws and policies, affecting institutions from courts to schools (Scottish Executive, 2005; Maitles & Deuchar, 2006; Mitchell, 2005; Ross, et al., 2007; Tisdall, Marshall, Cleland, & Plumtree, 2002). Hence, with that many driving forces, Scottish schools are good subjects to be studied since the national policies as well as their motivation are conducive to democratic practices in schools.

### *2.2.2.1 Limitations of Policy Implementation in Promoting Democratic Schools*

In spite of the good intentions of Scottish educational policies in promoting active pupil voice and participation in schools, there are a number of limitations inherent in the educational structure. This is because policy implementation may meet several obstacles with resistance from delivery agents as well as interference from other important agendas of education.

Despite the Scottish Government's endeavour to promote pupil participation in schools, there have been numerous criticisms that pupil councils were merely being tokenistic or paying lip service to Scottish educational policies (Maitles & Deuchar, 2006; McCluskey, et al., 2012; Whitty & Wisby, 2007). In an extreme example in England in 2000, some pupils were reported not aware of the existence of pupil councils in their school (Osler, 2000). Other than that, the issues dealt with in the pupil councils were reported to be revolving in 'charmed circles' such as school uniforms, bike racks, school canteens and other school infrastructure due to the reluctance of schools to give real power to pupil councils in Scottish schools (McCluskey, et al., 2012; Whitty & Wisby, 2007). Hence, Osler (2000) suspected that pupil councils were a channel for complaints 'with little democratic value' rather than a place for decision making (Allan & Ianson, 2004). More discouragingly, there were reports in Scotland that the final decision of the schools in dealing with issues discussed in pupil council meetings were not informed to students, which raise scepticism and cynicism among pupils (McCluskey, et al., 2012). In other parts of European society, the elected pupil councils were reported to be passive as they only expressed their views occasionally (Saha & Print, 2010). This passivity may be due to the students' habit of doing what they are told to do at school (Maitles & Deuchar, 2006).

Therefore, the description of pupil council above supports the fact that pupils having awareness, questions and voices over their surroundings and learning about their rights and responsibilities are regarded as radical or are discouraged in schools until now (Deuchar, 2003; Leighton, 2006; Ross, et al., 2007). A further discourse analysis on the understanding of citizenship education showed that the pupil participation made little change to the school system (Ross, et al., 2007). This is contradictory to what has been suggested by academic scholars, that a good citizenship education should teach students to be subversive to or challenge the existing cultural values (Leighton, 2006; Ross, et al., 2007) and that pupils should be competent at giving comments on teaching and learning in order to refute the schools' democratic practices as being tokenistic (Whitty & Wisby,

2007). Indeed, the authoritative teacher role which was regarded as the inherent nature of schooling and the inertia of change in school organisational structure has rendered democratic school a 'mission impossible' (Harber, 2004; Maitles & Deuchar, 2006; Tse, 2000). It is not surprising that introducing student-centred learning in schools met many obstacles and resistance since teachers were not ready to give their powers to pupils (Maitles & Deuchar, 2006).

Other than the poor implementation of pupil councils, there are also inherent problems in pupil councils since the proportion of pupils participating in pupil councils might be too low or only opened to some eloquent pupils without giving a chance for other pupils to have the opportunity to express their views (Ross, et al., 2007; Whitty & Wisby, 2007). Hence, it was suggested that if the democratic participation in schools using pupil councils as a vehicle only empowers a small number of students, it would encourage representative or adversarial democracy rather than deliberative democracy (Gutmann, 1999), which could be practiced in whole school meetings in alternative democratic schools.

The inability of schools in reaching the intended goals of curriculum reforms also shows the shortcomings of a top-down approach of policy implementation, where the outcomes of the reforms are usually mediated by several factors such as delivery agents, environmental factors for change and services available to the change agents (Baumfield, et al., 2010; Hutchinson & Hayward, 2005; Schweisfurth, 2000). It is disheartening when a survey of 78 schools in North-East Scotland showed that about one-fifth of the schools had not considered implementing Education for Citizenship at all (Cowan & McMurtry, 2009). This is known as the 'classical dilemma of top-down initiative, where policy makers wish their policies to be acceptable and non-threatening, while at the same time seeking to effect substantial changes in practices' (Swann & Brown, 1997, p. 110). In fact, the scholars also suggested that if 'teachers were reassured by the idea that "this is what we are already doing", they were unlikely to be motivated to engage in high levels of critical reflection on their existing thinking and practices' (p. 110). Other than that, such a phenomenon might also be the result of schools having difficulty understanding the rationale for more pupil voice as advocated in government policies (Whitty & Wisby, 2007). Therefore, the implementation of CfE might not be as effective as policy makers wished it to be. This may explain the failure of self-evaluation practice in putting Scottish schools to the expected level of progress when compared to other European countries, despite the fact that Scottish schools are performing better than before (McIlroy, 2013).

### *2.2.2.2 Limitations of Governments in Promoting Democratic Schools*

A national educational system is influenced by many aspects of life, from politics and economic development, to pressures from global organisations. Some international tests of scholastic performance such as Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) have allowed nations to compare their students' academic performance with other nations and created concerns over the rank of students' academic standards (Britton, 2013; Goldstein, 2004). In Scotland, this has a significant impact on teachers' workload despite the good intention of AifL in de-cluttering curriculum, since the policy document was criticised for paying too much attention to PISA and TIMSS, troubling teachers to deliver a flexible curriculum at the same time as focusing on increasing students' performance in standardised tests (Baumfield, et al., 2010; Hutchinson & Hayward, 2005). It was also said that teachers' decision making was still undermined with the constraints of the school curriculum and national examinations (Deuchar, 2003; Maitles & Deuchar, 2006), which could have also caused teachers to be authoritarian to students in classrooms despite the perceived democratic practices in school management (Dworkin, Saha, & Hill, 2003). Standardised testing has indeed played a significant role in Scottish education and is used as a benchmark for school effectiveness, which was called into question for its usefulness in increasing students' academic achievement and genuine learning (Hamilton & Brown, 2005; MacBeath, 2004). Several other benchmarks such as school effectiveness in promoting democratic values and pupils' social and emotional development in schools would be generally neglected in order to focus on academic excellence measured through standardised testing (Ross, et al., 2007).

Hence, Biesta (2009) questioned the purpose of assessment in measuring school effectiveness and called for careful discussion on the purpose of education, whether it is for qualification, socialisation or self-actualisation. This is because such discussion is important for what should be measured to describe good education instead of measuring what might be convenient to measure (Biesta, 2009; Hayward, 2007). It would be depressing that if what we are measuring using PISA or TIMSS only serves the privileged few instead of empowering the poor, while the poor do not recognise such inequality and continue to hold the illusion that education is liberating (Biesta, 2009; Pirrie & Lowden, 2004). Nevertheless, that is not to say that assessment is purely a necessary evil for comparison and social stratification (Carr, 2004). Assessments of the right kind are viewed

positively by some scholars as they could provide feedbacks to teachers and students on their teaching and learning quality and to inform parents of their children's progress (Alexander, 2001; Slavin & Davis, 2006). Therefore, assessments ideally should not only narrowly test students' academic performance via written examinations but should include assessments of other types of talents and intelligence (Hamilton & Brown, 2005; Hayward, 2007).

The situation is more complicated when people hold the government accountable for the education of their next generation while the government holds schools accountable for the quality of students through local councils and school inspections. It is evident in HGIOS, where the first measurement of the school success is its statutory compliance (HMIe, 2007). The problem is worsened when schools hold teachers accountable for pupils to receive the best possible achievement in educational qualifications as they determine the pupils' higher education and job entry (Alexander, 2001). Hence, some teachers felt unsafe in the vague guidelines of CfE due to the auditing culture and parental expectations of pupils' achievement while some head teachers were reported to perceive their role as managers instead of leaders due to bureaucratic constraints (MacBeath, 2013). Therefore, due to its assessment-driven nature and pressure on accountability, CfE was also heavily criticised for its suppression to higher-order thinking, student-centred learning and instructional support efforts (Baumfield, et al., 2010; Maitles & Gilchrist, 2005; Plank & Condliffe, 2013; Priestley & Humes, 2010).

Indeed, the auditing culture could be rigid particularly in England, where Summerhill was once threatened to be closed down unless they improved their students' curriculum attainment, which was antithetical to the school's philosophy (Thomas, 2013). The head teacher resorted to appealing to the European Union Court of Human Rights to defend their educational philosophy and they finally gained a victory after The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) decided to amend its report. This example is strong evidence of government being undemocratic since the diversity of education was not respected. Other than the extreme example, an auditing culture reflects general distrust of schools, which might in turn place distrust on teachers' professionalism and students' capability to learn and make decisions for the schools (Hutchinson & Hayward, 2005; Lees, 2010). This is a great barrier for schools to adopt school reforms since trust acts as a key resource for change initiatives (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Hence, Stronach & Piper (2008) thus suggested that an auditing culture should be lenient to allow certain progressivism in mainstream schools, similar to MacBeath's (2013) suggestion that

there should be greater flexibility in managing schools to allow head teachers to innovate and experiment with new school incentives.

Finally, blaming education solely for the lack of young people's participation in a political system is unjust as scholars have argued that the policy makers are releasing their responsibility to change the inherent problem of the political system to allow more participation from young people (Lawy & Biesta, 2006). The British government was also criticised for being hypocritical in handling domestic and international issues such as social mobility and peaceful resolution since these actions were counter examples to young people's political education (Pykett, 2007). Nevertheless, young people being educated in schools for participating in politics also sparked debates in some countries as education was expected to separate itself from politics (Schweisfurth, 2000). Arguments against political education are based on the argument that political education could potentially lead to indoctrination (Harber, 1989). This was refuted with a counter-argument that silencing politics in schools does not immunise young people from being indoctrinated. Instead, Biesta (2008) called for greater student participation in political life instead of depoliticizing and focusing too much on single issues such as environmental problems and terrorism, which have limited value in political participation.

### **2.2.3 The RRSA**

The RRSA is a programme initiated by UNICEF UK in 2004 whose objective is to place the UNCRC at the core of schools in the United Kingdom (UK) (Sebba & Robinson, 2009). In a report, UNICEF UK (2007, p. 1) organised the RRSA aims as below:

‘Our intention is to demonstrate convincingly in a large number of school communities and in a wide range of Local Authorities that:

- children and young people can raise their achievement at school and improve the quality of their own and their families' lives if they learn exactly what their rights and responsibilities are according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and how to use this understanding as a guide to living;
- children and young people will know how to go about making informed decisions and be active citizens if this rights/responsibilities guide to living is introduced at an early age and is reinforced throughout school life;

- UNICEF’s Rights Respecting School Award is an effective way of inspiring and supporting schools who want to provide children and young people with a rights-respecting guide to living.’ (Sebba & Robinson, 2009, p. 8)

Both primary schools and secondary schools are eligible for such awards as long as the criteria are met. There are four criteria for this award: ‘rights-respecting values underpin leadership and management’ which calls for the commitment from the senior management team (SMT) in the RRSA; ‘the whole school community learns about the Convention’ which assesses adults’ and children’s knowledge of the UNCRC and the effort of disseminating it through visual displays and teaching contents; ‘the school has a rights-respecting ethos’ which seeks for positive interactions amongst children and between children and adults in the schools as well as in classrooms based on mutual respect; and finally ‘children are empowered to become active citizens and learners which includes pupils’ understanding of and taking action on local and global issues including their learning environment (UNICEF UK, 2010b)<sup>2</sup>. Each school is given materials such as action plans and focus group framework for self-evaluation (UNICEF UK, 2011). The award is given based on a half-day school inspection which consists of pupils’ presentation of RRSA work, a school tour, classroom inspections and looking at evidence collected for the RRSA (NAHT, 2010).

In meeting the criteria and in implementing the RRSA, each school should introduce a school charter which is agreed by teachers and pupils (UNICEF UK, 2010b). The school charter should be designed by an RRSA steering group established to include teachers and pupils in implementing the RRSA (UNICEF UK, 2010c). The school charter design should also include articles of the UNCRC as a way to promote it. Teachers are responsible to incorporate the UNCRC in the curriculum when designing classroom teaching. Other ways of implementing the RRSA include visual displays of the UNCRC such as posters and speaking of the UNCRC during school assemblies (UNICEF UK, 2010a). The RRSA also encourages schools to support pupil councils as a way of upholding the UNCRC in schools. Once the Level One RRSA is achieved, schools are officially ambassadors for the RRSA and should actively promote it to other schools in order to reach the next level of the award. In addition to that, the UNCRC must be

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<sup>2</sup> More specific descriptions and the expected outcomes could be obtained from UNICEF websites, which are <http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Education-Documents/VLE/Assessment-Criteria-Level-1.pdf> for the Level One award and <http://www.unicef.org.uk/Documents/Education-Documents/VLE/Assessment-Criteria-Level-2.pdf> for the Level Two Award.

incorporated in each subject before the Level Two RRSA could be achieved (UNICEF UK, 2010b).

### *2.2.3.1 Is RRSA Promoting Democratic Schools?*

As stated above, the definition of a democratic school is highly related to the UNCRC. By encouraging schools to implement the UNCRC through the RRSA, it is possible that the adults could be more aware that children do have rights and deserve respect. Together with the criteria for the RRSA, rights-respecting schools should be more democratic with pupils being empowered to assert their rights to express their views, to education and to play.

Indeed, it has also been reported that ‘the values based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and “guide to life” provided by the RRSA has had a significant and positive influence on the school ethos, relationships, inclusivity, understanding of the wider world and the well-being of the school community, according to the adults and young people in the evaluation schools’ (Sebba & Robinson, 2009, p. 3). These characteristics are very similar to the reported benefits of alternative democratic schools, with the added value of global citizenship education which the alternative democratic school otherwise lacks (Harber 1989). Indeed, it has been reported that introducing the UNCRC into schools has improved the sense of community and school ethos (Covell & Howe, 2005; Sebba & Robinson, 2009). This may be due to the fact that students are more open to express their opinions that teachers should not shout at them (Sebba & Robinson, 2009). Teachers are also reported to have reflected more frequently on their teaching practices as a result of the RRSA. A quantitative study also revealed that students achieved a better result on Young’s Student Engagement in School Scale, which measures ‘rights-respecting climate, interpersonal harmony, academic orientation and participation’ (Covell, 2010). All items improved after the schools implemented rights-respecting curriculum except for academic orientation but it was expected that students would have a better academic achievement due to increased motivation and commitment to learning in the realization of their rights to education and their autonomy (Covell, 2010; Killen, 2012; Sebba & Robinson, 2009).

### 2.2.3.2 Criticisms on the UNCRC and the RRSA

Nevertheless, similar to the Scottish Government which received criticisms for its limited capacity in promoting democratic practices in school, the UNCRC and RRSA have also been criticised for its limitations in promoting pupil voice. The UNCRC has been criticised for its ambiguous language and how it was being upheld by governments. On the other hand, schools which implement the RRSA are being questioned for using the UNCRC as behavioural management instead of allowing pupils to assert their rights.

First of all, the UNCRC states that the extent to which children's views are taken into consideration is decided under the adults' judgement (UNICEF, 2012). Despite the fact that the UNCRC states that children are not their parents' product, there is a blurred line in the UNCRC language when considering to what extent parental rights are exercised and the degree of consultation with children depends on their age and mentality (Roose & Bouverne-De Bie, 2007). Instead of promoting equality between adults and children, this could possibly strengthen the dichotomy between children and adults since these considerations are under adults' judgement. Furthermore, van Beuren (1995) regrets that children's duties are omitted in the description of rights, which could have caused the rejection of the UNCRC enforcement in some nations, or in some schools on a smaller scale (Osler, 2000).

Moreover, when enforcing a particular right, such as the right to education, it runs the risk of infringing other rights such as rights to protection against violence, to cultural identity, to optimum health and to personality development (Harber, 2004). For example in South Africa, children who go to school are exposed to the risk of sexual assault and violence. Other than that, for ethnic Miao in Mainland China, schooling reduced the time for local girls to practice embroidery skills which are the determinant for successful marriage in their culture. Another example which is applicable to the Western context is that, since studying for examinations can pose severe stress to students, schooling can be damaging to young people's brain development since their mental health is affected. Taking the many examples of the harmful effects of schooling, questions arise as to which rights should be considered and weighed more at the expense of other rights.

In a rights-respecting school report, questions were raised on the extent to which pupils fully understand and believe in the values they were taught to acquire since extrinsic motivations such as 'reward points' were offered to them for adopting the values (Sebba &

Robinson, 2009). Other than that, there are concerns regarding miseducation of rights if pupils are taught that rights are conditional upon the children's action (Howe & Covell, 2010). This is based on the observation that the UNCRC is reported to discipline pupils, since pupils are taught to be responsible for their behaviours in schools and in classrooms so that the others' rights are upheld (Trivers & Starkey, 2012). The role of the UNCRC in behavioural management in school was hence criticised since to Trivers & Starkey (2012), human rights education should convey the message that human rights are earned through struggles.

Nevertheless, the situation could be improved as pointed out by Trivers & Starkey (2012): since the publication of Howe & Covell's (2010) 'Miseducating Children about their rights', rights-respecting schools have been avoiding linking rights with responsibility. Hence, Howe & Covell's (2010) message that children who have their rights fulfilled help others to fulfil their rights could get across to schools. This could move the mainstream educational beliefs about children more towards those conceptualised by alternative democratic school practitioners. However, more investigations are required to understand to what extent each right, such as the right to express their views, right to education and right to play and relaxation is upheld in the rights-respecting schools. Furthermore, the qualitative reports mentioned above are mainly from primary schools in England. How Scottish secondary schools uphold individual children's rights, and the challenges perceived by teachers and head teachers in doing so are important to explore to understand if mainstream schools could become democratic schools through the RRSA and government initiatives.

## **2.3 Summary**

This chapter has reviewed key literature on the concept of democratic schools and the context of this research. The concept of democratic schools began with the components of democracy for a nation and its usage in business contexts, followed by definition of 'democratic schools' by academic scholars and in this research. I defined 'democratic schools' as schools upholding the UNCRC and where school members share equal participation in school management. This research has made reference to many researchers' and practitioners' points of view and finally synthesised a definition that guides the subsequent data collection and analysis. It then explained how a democratic school could

operate and why researchers and practitioners around the world have been advocating a more 'democratic' approach to schools and classrooms by documenting the evidence of its benefits.

The second part of this chapter focused on the context of this research including the general picture of the mainstream schools together with the challenges for schools to be democratic. Then, the specific context and features of the research sample were described extensively with the depiction of the local educational policy and the award scheme that the schools are pursuing. Scottish educational policy has its own advantages of promoting democratic practices in schools and in classrooms but the limitations lie with the hierarchical structure of the educational system and other educational agenda that restricted the adoption of the policy in schools. On the other hand, the RRSA can provide initiatives for schools and could possibly compensate for the limitations of educational policies by encouraging schools to uphold the UNCRC in their daily practices and this was documented to be effective in improving schools in England. However, there are inherent limitations in the language of the UNCRC and a misinterpretation of rights education.

In order to understand the working of the RRSA specifically in the Scottish context and to explore the impact of the educational policies, empirical data were collected from Scottish rights-respecting secondary schools. The methodology for the data collection and the issues involved are illustrated in the following chapter.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

Since this research involves exploring teachers' and head teachers' views of democratic practices in schools, qualitative data such as interviews and documents are more suitable to describe their attitudes and beliefs. This is because these methods can give in-depth descriptions since their meaning and explanations are investigated in clear detail. Understanding and insights generated from these methods can help make sense of the empirical data (Cousin, 2013). Moreover, qualitative data can capture complex feelings and experience which are hard to be measured in quantitative methods. This matches the aims of this research.

However, qualitative research has been accused of being subjective and this will be mentioned along with the description of sampling, data collection and analysis methods below. The researcher's bias within these methods may decrease the authenticity of the data since the participants' responses may be distorted due to the researcher's own position and values (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2008). Therefore, the relationship between the researcher and the research context as well as between the researcher and the participants are described extensively throughout the dissertation. The next chapter contains the description of the context as the result of careful observation and immersion of data which were obtained as much as time permitted (Morse, et al., 2008). This has led to small sample but this qualitative study is unlike quantitative research that employs statistical analyses that can make predictions or generalisations. In contrast, qualitative research attempts to illustrate a phenomenon and gives possible explanations for that from the data themselves (Shank, 2002).

This chapter describes the methods of collecting and analysing the empirical data for this research. First, sampling and recruitment methods are described, followed by an illustration of how I conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants. The interview responses were triangulated with documents collected from the schools where possible. The rationale and strength of these two data collection methods are explained between the texts. The transcribed interview responses and collected documents form the core qualitative data for analysis. The limitations of these methods as well as the researcher's limitation were laid out after the description of these methods, together with

the evaluation of how my own cultural background could influence the research data. Finally, this chapter ends by explaining the ethical concerns of this research.

### **3.1 Sampling and Recruitment**

This study targeted Scottish secondary schools in the Central Scotland area which had obtained the Level One RRSA. A list of Scottish secondary schools along with their websites was obtained from Education Scotland websites (Education Scotland, 2014). From the school websites, a total of seventeen schools across eight local authorities in the Central Scotland area were identified as working towards the RRSA as they displayed the RRSA logo or showed the RRSA work on their school websites. Invitations to participate in this research were sent out to twelve schools across six local authorities (see Appendices H and I). Two schools rejected my request on the basis of busy commitments to the national curriculum while three schools across two local authorities agreed to participate. Another school was recruited through a participant's recommendation. As a result, four schools, namely schools B, C, H and W were recruited across two local authorities with two schools in each. The small number of schools and participants recruited was due to time constraint and the availability of the participants. The size of schools ranged from 600 to 1,400 and the percentage of students entitled to free meals ranged from 13% to 25%. Minority ethnic composition of the schools ranged from 2% to 25%. Details of each local authority and each school will be covered in the next chapter.

The RRSA coordinators of each school received me and helped recruit other participants who were involved in the RRSA or pupil council. A total of thirteen teachers and three head teachers participated in the study, which generated 10 hours of interview data. The number of teachers recruited in each school ranged from one to a maximum of five. The head teacher from each school was interviewed except for school B. The teaching experience of the interviewed teachers ranged from being a probationary teacher to a teacher who had taught for 30 years while the head teachers' experience ranged from 4 years to 11 years. Time taken for each interview ranges from 18 minutes to 58 minutes, where the shortest two interviews were done with head teachers due to time constraints (see Appendix E). All interviews were conducted in a quiet room on a one-to-one basis with no other person in the room. However, there was one case where two staff members were interviewed at once in a staff room where some other staff members were present.

Documents such as the RRSA inspection reports, pupil council meeting notes and school improvement plans were requested from the RRSA coordinators.

The degree of rapport building in the schools varied depending on the availability of time. Informal conversations were held whenever possible to understand the context and also for building rapport and trust. In school H, I spent about three half days in the staff room, interacting with staff members and also listening to their conversations amongst themselves while looking at their evidence folders for Level One RRSA inspection. I had a chance to have a tour around the school and was introduced to RRSA-related activities posted on the wall within the school building as well as observing RRSA inspection. During that period, I had the opportunity to observe quite a lot of interactions between the teachers and pupils. On the other hand, I spent about half a day in school B, where time was spent predominantly on interviews. I had the chance to look around the school building and to observe the interactions between the teachers and pupils nevertheless. For school C, I also spent about half a day interviewing the teachers and members of the SMT. Similar to school B, I had the chance to observe the interaction between the teacher and pupils as well as between the teachers and members of the SMT. I spent only an hour in school W for interviews since there were severe time constraints.

In addition to these participants, preliminary interviews that provided a backdrop were conducted with the directors of alternative democratic schools through Skype video calls instead of face-to-face interviews as below. The findings were mentioned in the previous chapters.

### **3.2 Semi-structured Interviews**

This research employs semi-structured interviews to investigate teachers' and head teachers' views of the RRSA and democratic schools. This section begins with a description of the characteristics of semi-structure interviews to explain the rationale of the method used. The weaknesses of the method are evaluated together with the issues faced during field work. Finally, the sub-section explores the power relations in the interviews.

Interviews in general allow open-ended answers when compared to questionnaires (Robson, 2002). This method is suitable for this exploratory and qualitative research since participants could voice their beliefs and attitudes towards the RRSA and democratic

schools without being forced to choose from the different options imposed by the researcher in questionnaires. This method also reduced participants' time and effort for writing down their direct responses but it increased the researcher's workload since the responses needed to be transcribed and coded for analysis. When compared to quantitative study, the sample is smaller since this research is time-bound and so generalisation is not sought in this research (Bryman, 2012).

Semi-structured interviews are situated in the continuum between structured and unstructured interviews (Rose, 1994). In a structured interview, participants are required to answer a fixed set of questions pre-determined by the researcher in which the interviewer cannot change the order of the questions and does not react to the participants' response. In contrast, in unstructured interviews the participants' response dominates the interview after being introduced to the topic and they are asked only probe questions to help continue the discussion. The interviewers may seek for clarity from the participants by asking follow-up questions. In the semi-structured interview in this research, a set of questions was designed to be used as guidance for the interviewer (see Appendix C). Depending on participants' responses, the interviewer can change the sequence of the questions or ask follow-up questions to seek clarity or to obtain extra information (Patton, 1980). This has given the interviewer the flexibility to ask questions that are not in the pre-determined set of questions but are within the interviewer's interests. As a result, the interview data can be in-depth and thick with descriptions and explanations (Robson, 2002). Questions can be omitted to avoid repetition if the participants have answered them in their previous response. This could help reduce participants' fatigue and boredom which could decrease the quality of their response. However, this method runs the risk of producing false data which is not within the participants' intention if the researcher asks guiding questions in the interviews (Bryman, 2012). This also reduces the reproducibility of this study since the questions raised during the interview are highly subjected to the researchers' intuition and participants' response. Other than that, extra caution was taken before asking questions for clarity so that I would not sound like attempting to 'appropriate' the participants' view (Salmon, 2007). Nevertheless, follow-up questions needed to be less prevalent in cases of severe time constraints. Without time constraints, the participants took time to consider their answers for my interview questions. An example of a follow-up question from an interview is shown as below:

'H: [...] Do you like the RRSA being introduced into this school?

A: Yes of course. Yep.

H: Umm why would you like that? Like, is there any reason why you like it being implemented?

A: Because the school umm are clear in the knowledge of understanding of the expectations. Pupils and the teachers have an awareness and they have also participated in creating our own charter so therefore they are empowered by the fact that they have been able to have an input as well as an expectation, not just for themselves but also teacher.' (Adele, school H)

From the conversation above, since the teacher did not volunteer the information as to why she perceived the RRSA implementation to be desirable, a follow-up question was asked to seek for clarity. Another example is given below:

'J: [...] Other challenges in getting the unity but it is the same with any project you take forward in the school. We have 120 staff in this school, and to get every single person with the passion that [Eleanor] has, is almost impossible. You have a sliding scale of passion amongst them, you have people like [Eleanor] and myself and [Sean] and all of the SMT, we are the passionate end. You have lots in the middle, and even a few who are still taking a bit of time to adapt, to come into line possibly, but they will get there, it's just a matter of time. So I think you have to be prepared, that there will be doubters, there will be people who will say to you, how much does that cost? [...]

H: And you said there are some teachers [doubt] the process...

J: Well, I think they don't... they don't, they don't doubt the purpose of what we are, the purpose of having engaged with this, but they, what they is [unclear] are children really valued or not. And I think that comes from the fact that they don't always see the steering group, they don't always see... what we see from children, they come up here to talk to us, it's a good stuff, they may be getting slightly different, they won't have... they will be more focused on their subjects...' (James, school C)

From the example above, an extra piece of information regarding the reason why some teachers were perceived to be doubters was given. This shows the usefulness of asking follow-up questions in gaining in-depth understanding of participants' perception. Overall, this method was useful for me to explore the reality perceived by the participants

based on the topic I am interested in (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The participants were recognised as the experts on the detailed workings of their school or classroom.

By the end of this study, fifteen interviews were conducted and transcribed ad verbatim. As a result, about 100,000 words of interview transcripts were generated (see Appendix E). The transcripts, along with the collected documents as will be described below, were all fed into the process of data analysis.

### 3.2.1 Power Relations

Semi-structured interviews give power partially to the participants to voice their opinions instead of being regarded as a tool or mine of data (England, 1994, p. 243). This is because the control over the content of the research is shared by the researcher and the participants as the researcher acts as a guide and responds to the participant's response for clarity and follow-up. Nevertheless, the participants in this interview were required to answer the researcher's questions without much deviation from the topic discussed. Furthermore, the researcher is in total control of the analysis process and the reporting of the data. Hence, an interview is conceptualised as the co-construction of data, together with the fact that how participants respond to me is dependent on my reaction and my identity (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997). This was particularly so since in some parts of the interviews I contributed very much to the interviews as a way to stimulate further discussion, building rapport and trust, which were important to make sure that participants could be fully engaged, trust the researcher and feel comfortable to express their views without feeling exhausted or being exploited (Bryman, 2012). This contribution could also increase my confidence in conducting interviews since the interactions would become more natural. An example of the researcher's attempts to build rapport is shown as below,

'L: [...] So there are different ways to try to make the children more aware and we have also done things at our school is 100 years old last year and we had an anniversary fete and then there was a stand, a UNICEF stand, as well, so that was being it, more open to register the school itself to the wider community people, were coming through the door to see, it was an open door policy and we had a lot of UNICEF stuff up so that people who have passed, pupils to local community to Chaplaincy team to local councillors, it's been fed for within the field for just

within the building and the pupil itself so it's trying to seek out the other community as well.

H: Wow, that's a [...] great commitment of the school to really...

L: It is. It is quite ambitious as well to take it further than here but that's always been the aim of it to involve a wider school community.' (Liz, school H)

From the interview section above, it demonstrates that a positive comment on the participant's response triggered a very personal opinion towards how she thought of the school and uncovered the school's aim for organising a big event.

The power relationship between the researcher and the participants could also vary depending on the participants' occupation. This is because head teachers could be classified as elites in this study since they enjoy power and have high status in their schools due to their talent and skills (Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen, & Tahvanainen, 2002). This implies that the researcher might have less control when interviewing the elites since they could be more assertive and persuasive (Welch, et al., 2002). In such case, I would need to protect my research from being guided away from the focus since the elites could act like a superior, critic or consultant to my research (Berry, 2002). In reality, the head teachers interviewed were very kind and helpful such that I felt that I still maintained control and autonomy over the interview, similar to what I felt when conducting interviews with teachers (Smith, 2006). Therefore, I did not feel the urgent need to conceptualise my interviews with head teachers as elite interviews or to attempt to gain control of the interview.

### **3.3 Documents collection for Triangulation**

School documents were collected since they are useful in understanding the school context and the details of the RRSA implementation that were not covered by the teachers. The documents are also a useful tool to triangulate what the participants have reported in the interviews when some events and documents were mentioned. Document analysis involves gathering information and studying the content and structure of the documents, including their functions in the wider context (Bowen, 2009). Hence, document analysis can be as rich as interview transcripts as there are a number of ways to analyse the documents including the tone and formality of the documents, the intention of the writer of

the documents (including their latent content), their effect and influence on their targeted audience and the assumption of the knowledge possessed by the targeted audience (Bryman, 2012).

In this study, school documents such as local council school reports, school websites, school handbooks, school vision and values, school improvement plans, school behavioural policies, school charters, HMIe and RRSA school inspection reports, RRSA action plans, RRSA steering group meeting minutes, RRSA impact evaluation forms, RRSA pupil surveys and focus group results, staff evaluation results, e-mails related to RRSA implementation, teaching materials, homework and assessment sheets, presentation slides for assemblies and Continuing Professional Development (CPD), pupil council meeting minutes, parents' handbook and school newsletter were retrieved from the four participating schools as much as the situation allowed (see Appendix F).

Since the documents were not produced purposely for the research, this method has the advantage of having high internal validity (Robson, 2002). Nevertheless, as suggested by Bryman (2012), the authenticity, credibility and representativeness of the documents should be questioned to maintain the quality of the research. As the documents were provided by official websites of the Scottish Government and the participating schools, it is suggested that several potential shortcomings of documents such as authenticity and credibility could be avoided. However, the representativeness of documents from participating schools must be taken with extra caution since school documents being analysed were not comprehensive enough, varied from school to school, and might not have the impact as expected by the researcher and therefore may not reflect the reality.

### **3.4 Thematic analysis**

This research employed thematic analysis for the data collected through interviews and document collection. Thematic analysis searches for themes and patterns in the data, including the manifest and latent content (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Manifest content is what is apparent, 'visible, surface or obvious' of the data while latent data explores the underlying meaning in the data, including the tone of the interview and the context of the documents (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 318). In searching for and identifying different themes and patterns, I must be open to the data and accept what they might offer, including the viewpoints with which I disagree. The repeated themes are noted in thematic analysis

but unlike content analysis, it explores data beyond the frequency and occurrence of themes and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It analyses the meaning and context of the data and hence it takes the intensity of the response and the order of the data into account. In this way, the subtlety and complexity of the data are explored in depth with attention to the nuances and details of the data (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). This matches the purpose of qualitative study that gives thick description and possible explanations for the data.

The process of data analysis was similar to the methods used by grounded theory, including coding and designing the coding frame (Birks & Mills, 2011). The processes below are all aided by NVivo since it was effective in handling and viewing large amount of data, improving the quality of data analysis (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Initially, codes for themes were derived from interview questions and research questions as the main guidance (Robson, 2002). Initial exploration of interview data through transcription and reflection notes was also helpful in identifying repeated patterns of responses, which could potentially form themes for coding from the interview data (Bryman, 2012). After initial coding, more specific themes were generated from and categorised under the broad themes. This gave rise to a hierarchical structure of the codes in the coding scheme (Birks & Mills, 2011). Some broad themes were combined or were made subordinates to other themes. Some were rejected due to limited responses. Some examples of broad themes are 'Benefits', 'Challenges' and 'Facilitating factors'. The examples of the subordinates of the broad theme 'Benefits' are 'Awareness of rights', 'Bringing people together', and 'Disciplining pupils'. 'Bringing people together' has the further subordinates of 'Common goal' and 'Positive relationship'. Throughout the coding process, reflections and comments on the interview data were taken down in the form of memo and notes (Robson, 2002). By the end of data analysis, NVivo has helped generated tree maps (see Appendix J) and various reports for a more specific interpretations and interesting insights. NVivo has also allowed the researcher to key in queries to understand the relationship between different themes and sources of data.

### **3.5 Limitations**

In terms of generalizability, there are a number of limitations to my methodology due to the subjectivity involved in this qualitative study, from sampling method to data analysis. Other than that, the limitations of this study include those that stem from the

homogeneity of the participants, sampling process, semi-structured interview, transcription and data analysis. The limitations are laid out together with the description of my effort to reduce them.

The recruitment process is opportunistic as it is dependent on my ability to identify rights-respecting schools and the availability of the schools. I was not able to identify secondary schools which had registered interest in the RRSA but had not shown their work on their school websites. As the new educational policy CfE was taking effect in the schools, some schools rejected my request due to commitments to the school curriculum. Thus, these might have compromised the diverse range of participants available to this research such that only deeply committed participants were involved. Furthermore, the nature of my research requires commitment from the participating schools and teachers without any incentive, which suggests a bias in sampling or a certain quality exhibited among the participants. Despite this potential methodological flaw, this ensures that ethical guidelines are followed as participation in this research should be voluntary.

Other than that, as discussed above, the in-depth study of the schools and the qualitative methods used in this research have limited the number of participants in this research, as have time constraints. This decreases the generalizability of this research. Nevertheless, the repeated patterns of the participants' response were highlighted in the main findings and it is these that are the focus, rather than generalisation. These methods could ideally have been enhanced by participant-observation or ethnographic method to triangulate the results with the documents and interview data. Moreover, only teachers and head teachers were included in this study, without input from pupils and parents who are the important stakeholders of the school. If interviews were done on them, the results could also have triangulated with the reports from teachers and head teachers. Nevertheless, the research questions focus on teachers and head teachers rather than pupils and parents.

Next, the subjectivity in conducting interviews and analysing the data as discussed above is inherent in this study and decreases the reproducibility and generalizability of this research. Hence, to address potential bias, I have explicitly stated my background and how I position myself in the research in Chapter 1 to acknowledge the possibility of distorting the participants' voice and to allow the reader to judge (Scott & Morrison, 2005). These methods are also highly dependent on the researcher's experience and ability to ask relevant questions in the interviews or identifying themes during data analysis (Briggs, 1986). Other than that, transcribing interviews has also introduced another layer of subjectivity since listening is a top-down cognitive process and hence the contents of

interview transcripts are highly dependent on how I interpreted the participant's responses (Tilley, 2003). Moreover, stress, pause, tone, volume of speech and sarcasm in the participants' responses were omitted in the interview transcripts which might have caused the participants' intended message being misinterpreted (Lemke, 2012).

Finally, my cultural background and experience in school setting have also introduced some limitations as well as strengths in this research, which will be discussed below.

### **3.6 My Cultural Background and Experience**

My cultural background as a Malaysian could have several implications for the data collection and analysis. This is because the interview data, as mentioned above, is co-constructed such that the participants' responses were also dependent on my identity. There are several advantages and disadvantages from that.

The researcher's position in the international research context could have two dimensions, which are the researcher's familiarity with the researched context and the similarity of the researcher's home context to the researched context (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014). In my case, I am not familiar with the researched context nor is my home context similar to the researched context. I may experience culture shock during my field work, as mentioned in Chapter 1, and so I was highly sensitive and taking extra consciousness to what was being observed. Hence, it was suggested that 'data can be difficult to interpret and the exoticism of the context may be unduly emphasized in the outcomes of the research' (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014, p. 55).

Cunningham-Sabot (1999) on the other hand gave another picture on the interaction between the researched context and the foreign researcher. It was suggested that participants will reveal more details to a cultural foreigner than to a cultural insider. This might be an advantage to me as a researcher to obtain extra information from what was known to be common sense to the locals. However, as suggested by Cunningham-Sabot (1999) I must understand the context well so that my research carries depth rather than problematizing issues on the surface value. Taking this advice, I studied the policy context as well as the inspection reports and the websites of the schools to gain more background

knowledge before going into the schools. Informal conversations were held with teachers and pupils whenever it could to understand the current situation of the school.

Finally, my command and limitation in the local language at times triggered unexpected responses and affected the response given to me since the participants might have adjusted their responses according to my identity as a cultural foreigner. Nevertheless, clarity was sought whenever there were potential misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

### **3.7 Ethical Issues**

This study follows the ethical guidelines from Scottish Educational Research Association (SERA) and has been approved by the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee for the period from 15<sup>th</sup> January 2014 to 31<sup>st</sup> September 2014 (see Appendix A). Permissions for the research were also sought from the local authorities before collecting documents from the schools and interviewing the teachers and head teachers (SERA, 2005).

As recommended in the SERA guidelines, participants were invited to take part in my study voluntarily and were able to withdraw from my study anytime if they requested (SERA, 2005). Each participant was given a Plain Language Statement which states the purpose and nature of my study (see Appendix C). They were also asked to sign a consent form to confirm having read the Plain Language Statement which assures them of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses (see Appendix B). Other than that, by signing the consent form they agreed to be audio-taped and have their responses transcribed and returned for verification (Bryman, 2012). These procedures were not a problem to all my participants except for one participant who needed to be re-assured of the confidentiality of her responses and the documents provided to me. The signed consent forms were returned to the researcher to be kept as a record.

During the field work, my identity as a researcher from the University of Glasgow and the nature of my investigation were stated in order to assure my participants that I wasn't the inspector and that their participation was voluntary (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, I was able to build rapport with some of the participants when I was at the stage of documents collection and before the interviews were started (Robson, 2002). Some observations and information which was shared informally were taken down as notes (Birks & Mills, 2011).

Their time for this research was appreciated especially for the fact that they were very busy and under immense pressure to prepare for national examinations. With the rapport built with the interviewees I might have made them feel obliged to participate in my study but at the same time I re-emphasised the fact that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from this study anytime without giving any reason. No participant recruited withdrew as a result of this. I made sure that their time was well-spent by making sure the good quality of this research and by presenting the extended abstract of this research to the participants (SERA, 2005). To my delight, some participants expressed that the interview was interesting and brought some ideas back to their school, which helped me gain confidence for the subsequent interviews. Some participants were also pleased to take this opportunity to discuss their work as a way to disseminate their experience and make contributions to the wider community.

Finally, extra caution was taken when presenting the data to make sure the participants' identities remain anonymous (SERA, 2005). I also attempted to do justice to the participants when reporting my main findings (Bryman, 2012). These are important as stated in SERA guidelines, for the reputation of the field as well as the participants should be maintained so that further access to the participants by the other researchers is not affected (SERA, 2005).

### **3.8 Summary**

This chapter has illustrated the methodology and its rationale according to the chronological order of each step, from sampling and recruitment, through semi-structured interviews and document collection to thematic analysis. At the same time, how I handled the power relations and my background were explored since the relationship between the researcher and the participants are significant to the results of data collection and analysis. Limitations were also acknowledged as it is important to be transparent about the data collection methods and potential biases. Ethical issues and their impacts on the research and participants during data collection and reporting of the results were also noted in this chapter. The main findings generated from the data collection are set out below.

## Chapter 4: Main Findings

This chapter first reports the background and the pupil council status of the schools with the information gathered from school documents and the participants' interviews. Then, teachers' and head teachers' views on the initiation, implementation, challenges and their solutions, facilitating factors and benefits of implementing the RRSA are reported. The report of their future aspiration in relation to the RRSA or improving pupil voice and participation is followed by their perception of democratic schools and classrooms.

### 4.1 Background of the Schools

Two local authorities located in the Central Scotland area gave permission to conduct the research in the schools within their area. The two local authorities are in the mid-range of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), where Local Authority 1 (LA1) is slightly better than the national average while Local Authority 2 (LA2) has slightly higher levels of deprivation (Scottish Government, 2012). The percentage of pupils registered for free school meals in LA1 was lower than the national average while that in LA2 was slightly higher. In the three years from 2010 to 2012, according to the Education Scotland website, the average S4 examination results<sup>3</sup> and pupil attendance rates in LA1 schools were better than the national average while on average LA2 schools had lower by a few percentage points in S4 examination results and pupil attendance rates than the national average (Education Scotland, 2014). S5 and S6 staying on rates in LA1 was higher than the national average while LA2 had similar rates to the national average. Pupils in LA1 schools mainly leave for higher education while the leaver destinations in LA2 schools followed a similar pattern to the national average.

Two schools from each local authority were recruited for this study, giving four schools in total, namely schools B, C, H and W. Schools B and W are within LA1 and schools C and H are within LA2. All these schools are state funded, co-educational and non-denominational integrated community schools. All schools except for school C have recently been inspected by HMIe and will not be inspected in the near future. All schools

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<sup>3</sup> S4 examination results are used as comparison instead of S5 and S6 examination results since they were affected by S5 and S6 staying on rates.

to a different degree were actively participating in a range of competitions, extra-curricular activities and a number of citizenship initiatives, such as establishing a partnership with an African school, Eco-school, Fair Trade School and organising charity events for their local community as well as for global issues. Other than that, all schools pursued the RRSA voluntarily.

School B had about 600 pupils and 64 full-time equivalent teachers in September 2012, according to the Education Scotland website. About 20% of the pupils were registered for free school meals, which was higher than the national and local authority averages. The S4 examination results, attendance rate and leaver destinations generally followed the national average. The S5 and S6 staying on rates were higher than the national average but lower than the local authority average. The pupils' ethnic background was not very diverse, as the RRSA inspection report stated that 98% pupils identified themselves as white Scottish (UNICEF UK, 2014). In addition, 28% of the pupils required additional support and 4% of the pupils were Looked After and Accommodated by the Local Authority. The school received good and very good categories for the quality indicators in the HMIe inspection report published in 2008. The school started implementing the RRSA 2 years ago and by the time of interview, the school had just received the Level One RRSA recently. Other than that, school B underwent recent changes in the SMT, introduced school blazers and a new merit scheme which rewards pupils for regular attendance.

School W had about 900 pupils and 70 full-time equivalent teachers in September 2012. About 13% of the pupils were registered for free school meals, which was higher than the local authority average, but lower than the national average. The pupil attendance rate, patterns for leaver destinations, S4 examination results and S5 staying on rate were similar to the local authority average, while the S6 staying on rate was similar to the national average. According to the school handbook for the academic year 2014/15, '[t]he school [...] attract[ed] a number of placing requests, mainly from the City of Glasgow. [The] students [...] include an ethnic minority population of some 25%' (p.5). The school received very good and excellent categories for the quality indicators in the HMIe inspection report published in 2011. The school achieved the Level One RRSA two years before I visited the school. The school is the first rights-respecting secondary school in the local council area.

School C was recently merged in 2007 and that gave rise to about 1,400 pupils in total and 120 full-time equivalent teachers in September 2012. Extensive consultation with

the pupils and the wider community was conducted before the school was established to decide the school name, vision and values. As mentioned in several interviews and as stated in the RRSA inspection report, there were a lot of problems when the school was just merged since the pupils were divided according to their original school. The situation was resolved recently due to various reasons which will be discussed in later sections. More than 20% of the pupils were registered for free school meals, which was higher than both the local authority and national averages. The S4 examination results were similar to the local authority average. The S5 staying on rate was slightly higher than the local authority average but the S6 staying on rate was similar to the national average. The pupil attendance rate was better than the local authority average but lower than the national average. The school had been working on the RRSA for 5 years and achieved the Level One RRSA a year ago. The school is the first rights-respecting secondary school in the local council area and kept a close contact with the local council to act as an example of a successful RRSA implementation. The school is currently pursuing the Level Two RRSA and actively taking up an ambassadorial role to increase awareness of the UNCRC in local communities and to share the ideas of the RRSA implementation with other schools within the local authority as well as in some universities and educational events.

School H is based in a century-old building and has recently celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. There were about 1,300 pupils and 100 full-time equivalent teachers in September 2012. The percentage of the pupils registered for free school meals was similar to both the local authority and national averages. The pupil attendance rate was similar to the national average. The school leaver destinations and S4 examination results were slightly worse than the local authority average while the S5 and S6 staying on rates were similar to the local authority and national averages. The school received good and very good categories for the quality indicators in the HMIe inspection report published in 2009. The head teacher and some teachers commented that pupils' behaviour was a challenge to the school which needed to be focused on. Nevertheless, teachers and the head teacher were in agreement that there were a lot of global citizenship activities that were led by the pupils and some of them were high profile when compared to the other schools. By the time of my field work, the school was preparing for the Level One RRSA inspection and by the time of data analysis, the school had achieved the Level One RRSA successfully.

## **4.2 Pupil Council Status**

The members of school B pupil council attended meetings according to their respective year group. They consisted of the class representatives who volunteered or were elected in their class. The candidates were required to give a short speech before the class election. A participant from school B expressed the need for the pupil council to improve by having more regular meetings in accordance with the RRSA implementation guidance. The pupil council had discussed issues such as rewards for the Merit Scheme, school blazers and lockers for pupils.

In school W, the head teacher was directly involved with the pupil council meeting and the pupil council was described as a strong pupil council. They met four times a year and avoided the examination period. They discussed issues such as what they had done well and what could be improved in the school. However, the head teacher disagreed with some of the pupils' perspective on the meeting minutes. The head teacher reported that the pupil council was involved in the school improvement plan, school tie design, a quiet study room, school trips and the house system.

In school C, the pupil council members were class representatives and a deputy head teacher was directly involved in the pupil council. She intended to gradually retreat from the pupil council and to let pupils take charge of the meetings rather than taking notes and preparing meeting minutes for them. She suggested that previously this did not work since the pupils were busy preparing for national examinations. Since there were some pupils who attended leadership training, she speculated that they could improve this situation and chair the meeting themselves. The pupil council discussed issues such as school blazers, lockers, litter, the school tie, the school's name and the length of lunch time. Another deputy head teacher suggested that more pupil council meetings were unnecessary as the issues discussed were limited due to various physical and financial constraints and so issues discussed in the pupil council would be repeated if more meetings were organised. He also commented that the pupil council would not talk about curricular issues. The pupil council was aided by a pupil voice box, where pupils could drop their issues and complaints anonymously into a box placed in a strategic area within the school. Regarding the pupil voice box, the head teacher commented that the pupils should be given better knowledge of what could be raised as an issue in the voice box. This was because several issues such as the school dining menu were thought to be irrelevant and they should be discussed with the staff directly.

The school H head teacher reported that he spoke to the Head Boys and Head Girls directly and the pupil council consisted of class representatives. Teachers in school H did

not comment much on their pupil council but one teacher expressed strong confidence in their pupil council and indicated that their voices were being heard. It was reported in a collated RRSA focus group response sheet that the pupils were not aware of the pupil council and the changes brought by them. Nevertheless, the pupil council came forward with some suggestions for registration periods and punishment exercises.

### **4.3 Rationale for the Research**

As mentioned in the first chapter, the research questions of this study are about investigating whether the RRSA is a gateway for schools to become democratic schools, and assessing how teachers and head teachers perceive ‘democratic’ practices in schools. The RRSA requires schools to embed the UNCRC into classroom teaching as well as into school practices. In accordance with that, schools are required to take pupil voice into consideration when making decisions that affected them, and to meet their physical and psychological needs. Other than that, the RRSA implementation includes the establishment of an RRSA steering group consisted of teachers and pupils. The group explores the ideas for meeting the RRSA criteria, including replacing school rules with school charters which are agreed and signed by all pupils and teachers. The four criteria of RRSA are ‘rights-respecting values underpin leadership and management’, ‘the whole school community learns about the Convention’, ‘the school has a rights-respecting ethos’, and ‘children are empowered to become active citizens and learners’ (UNICEF UK, 2010b). To achieve the Level Two RRSA, each subject needs to embed the UNCRC in its teaching content and the schools are required to be ambassadors for the RRSA.

Within these criteria of implementation, it would be of great value to investigate to what extent these rights were upheld in these schools. The participants were assumed to be enthusiastic and motivated in improving their schools. Their opinions on the RRSA and their conceptualisation of a democratic school are hence important to understand how their passion could be replicated in other schools, and to consider at the same time what the barriers are for schools seeking to respect individual rights and sharing their responsibilities in running the school with pupils.

## 4.4 The RRSA Implementation

A series of findings on the RRSA are presented here to give a comprehensive picture of how schools initiated and implemented the RRSA. How teachers and head teachers perceive its benefits, challenges, facilitating factors and the future actions on the RRSA are reported as they could shed light on the extent to which the schools could be democratic. Finally in the next section, their conceptualisation of democratic schools and classrooms are presented in terms of their understandings and how favourable their reactions to such concept might be.

### 4.4.1 What Triggered It?

Making a full picture of the triggers of the RRSA in each school required an integration of many interview responses as the documents collected did not directly and explicitly reveal such information. Some participants had limited knowledge around the initiation of the RRSA in their own school and thought that the RRSA emerged from an invitation from the local council. A discrepancy between teachers and the head teacher in a school about who first brought the idea of the RRSA was also found. Hence, the report of the RRSA initiations below is rather tentatively drawn from a consensus of the majority of participants in one school.

There was a variety of information sources about the RRSA that triggered its adoption in schools and they differed from one school to another. Teachers or head teachers might first learn about the RRSA through: a new staff member who had a connection with a UNICEF staff; a visit to an event in Glasgow city chamber; the local council and the RRSA websites; a visit from and to other schools; or a spontaneous conversation with a UNICEF staff. Following from that, the advocacy of the RRSA in a school could be either or both top-down and bottom-up; from the SMT, or from teachers, and even pupils respectively. In 3 out of the 4 schools, the SMT was the main trigger or the driving force for the RRSA implementation, where teachers were requested by their head teachers to volunteer themselves to be the RRSA coordinators. One teacher strongly believed that the RRSA implementation must come from the top-downwards such that,

‘...if you do not have the support from the senior management, it’s a waste of time.

It has to be led by the head teacher... the head teacher has to go with that. It’s part

of their school [and] because it has to be coming from them, and they are for the head teacher.’ (Felicia<sup>4</sup>, school W)

In one exceptional case in school C, a probationary teacher suggested to the SMT to incorporate the RRSA in the school. Later on, although the teacher had left, the school continued this initiative with support from the SMT. This was also accompanied by a bottom-up form of support, where the new pupils in that school who were previously from rights-respecting primary schools provided ideas for the RRSA implementation.

Schools pursued the RRSA for many different reasons. The RRSA was initially recognised for its focus on citizenship education in 3 out of the 4 schools. These schools intended to encourage pupils to participate in charity and global citizenship activities through working towards the RRSA. For example, the RRSA was introduced into school C when a citizenship committee was established in the school. Other than that, school H had already organised a significant number of global citizenship activities which could be brought to greater prominence with the RRSA. In fact, one teacher in school H expressed her surprise at the aims of the RRSA since it was expected to promote children’s rights in developing countries only but never expected that children’s rights could be improved in the UK and within her school since she thought that ‘everybody has got the idea that we all live in Britain, everybody’s rights have been met, everything is fine, everything is ok’. She continued,

‘It’s not until we actually sat down and looked through it and actually realised that this is not about the greater world because we have to look at ourselves first before you look at anybody else. So I think for me that’s [a] huge eye opener.’ (Katharine, school H)

The potential links with behavioural management strategies were also an attractive aspect of the RRSA but appeared to be a minor or secondary reason to implement the RRSA. For these schools, it was only discovered later in the process of implementation that the RRSA could bring about good ways of managing pupils’ behaviour. Nevertheless, the behavioural change brought about by the RRSA was expected from the start of the implementation phase since this beneficial effect was stated consistently in many rights-respecting school reports. A teacher participant expressed scepticism around the reported effects of the RRSA when it was first introduced but was then very surprised and delighted to experience the extent of change in the pupils’ positive behaviour brought by the RRSA.

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<sup>4</sup> This and all other names throughout this dissertation are pseudonyms for anonymity.

Other reasons were also present in the schools investigated. Generally, the RRSA had provided a common goal for schools to work towards, especially for schools B and C. School B also attempted to promote greater equality across pupils' academic performance, and to raise the awareness of global justice via the introduction of the RRSA. For school W which fared very well in terms of academic performance, the fact that the vision and values of the RRSA matched those of the school and that the school aimed to involve pupils in decision making made the school pursue the RRSA.

#### **4.4.2 How did They Implement It?**

Schools were actively seeking ideas to meet the four criteria set up by UNICEF and much effort was placed in increasing the awareness of the RRSA and the UNCRC among the pupils. As a result, they adopted a wide range of whole school strategies to meet this important RRSA criterion, such as visual displays of school charters and the UNCRC articles, curriculum designs, school improvement plans and extra-curricular activities. For the examples of visual displays, posters of the UNCRC articles and the school charters were visible around the school, staff office and classroom walls. School H used posters from the SCCYP. Other than that, reading a UNCRC article in weekly or monthly school or year group assemblies, some of which were delivered by pupils, was also commonly stated in the RRSA action plans. In some schools, the RRSA steering group was responsible for designing the 'right of the week' or 'month', and maintaining the RRSA website. In school H, teachers were required to read out the right of the week during the registration period. The news and updates related to the RRSA were also shown on TV screens in schools C and H. In addition, school C invested a lot in the displays of the RRSA. In that school, a big board could be seen when entering the school that displayed its rights-respecting status as well as the logo of the vision and values of the school. To make sure more pupils can participate in and to be more aware of this initiative, school W involved different groups of pupils such as the pupil council and the graphic department in designing the charter. Finally, the RRSA was also commonly stated in school newsletters, school handbooks and school improvement plans to show its high priority in the schools.

School charters, to some teachers, replaced school rules which used negative language. The school charters were designed with guidance from other school charters and the language used in the charter was very different across the schools. Some schools adopted consistently positive language in the charters while some other charters used rather

prohibitive or warning language such as ‘[Do] [n]ot chew gum’ or ‘Accept the consequences of your actions’. The articles which were associated with the charters were chosen according to pupils’, teachers’ or even parents’ indicated preference in a survey as some articles were thought not to be related to schools. Generally, the right to education was accorded the highest priority. In a school whose charter included only one article, it was recommended that they should include more rights in the charter. Some charters stated a clear distinction of teachers’ and pupils’ roles but also included their common responsibilities in the school.

Other than using physical displays of the UNCRC and school charters to increase pupils’ awareness of the UNCRC, the RRSA steering groups were also active in brainstorming ideas to improve pupil voice and to link the UNCRC with social justice. For example, school C introduced a pupil voice box to encourage pupils to voice their opinions, and also amended their behavioural policy in line with rights-respecting language. School practices which violate the UNCRC such as punishment, detention and exclusion were abolished and replaced by a merit system or were referred to the school charter whenever pupils or teachers misbehaved. These encouraged reflective exercise and critical thinking among the pupils and were compatible with restorative practices. The RRSA coordinators also reflected on the pastoral care services available to pupils as evidence for practicing the UNCRC. There were a number of global citizenship initiatives in the schools such as Fair Trade schools and Eco-Schools which could be linked to the RRSA and used as evidence of their commitment to the RRSA. Other than that, extra-curricular activities such as fundraising for a local or global charity including Mary’s Meals or African schools and a trip to Auschwitz that commemorates the Holocaust all fell under the umbrella of the RRSA. Schools also established partnerships with the chaplaincy team and NGOs such as Amnesty International to obtain materials for global citizenship education.

The degree of teacher participation in the RRSA varies across different schools. Teachers in all schools were required to design curriculum activities and assessments that increase pupil awareness of the UNCRC, including teaching about wants and needs. Teachers received support for this additional task in workshops organised by UNICEF UK or through CPD, some of which was presented by pupils. Otherwise for the extra-curricular activities and the design of the school charter, teachers gave guidance or were involved indirectly by providing ideas since the initiatives should be led by pupils, as required by the RRSA criteria. However, a participant reported having to initiate charity events when pupils were too passive,

‘I was talking to boys about how you could have emm sort of impact on... how you can impact in a school or a school impact on you so they just sit and look at me... I started to say, “We will remember look at this and look at that and say how about guide dogs and how about this,” and then they will go, “Oh yea, that’s right. We could do that.”’ (Katharine, school H)

In some schools, there were pupil-initiated activities such as a bake sale event to raise funds for volunteering overseas. Finally, the RRSA coordinators also used a range of documents provided by the UNICEF UK such as focus group guidelines, school self-evaluation forms and the action plans for the RRSA to gauge pupils’ understanding of and opinions towards the UNCRC and to help brainstorm ideas for the RRSA implementation and improvement. The interview questions for the focus groups had a series of questions for pupils such as what needs and wants are, a discussion of school rules, if teachers’ treated pupils fairly, issues around rights and how to make the school or the world a better place.

#### **4.4.3 What were Their Challenges?**

When participants were asked about the challenges set by the RRSA, they struggled to list the obstacles they faced when implementing the RRSA. Teachers in school B in particular did not think there was any such challenge. Nevertheless, when prompted with more questions, several challenges emerged. Each school faced different challenges but the most prominent and common challenge they faced was time constraints and the additional workload experienced by teachers and pupils. Other challenges included resistance from some teachers, some disengaged pupils, and funding. Some schools also faced situational difficulties specific to the school context.

Scottish secondary schools are generally busy places, especially at the time of the empirical research, as teachers were required to prepare S4 pupils who were the first batch of pupils sitting the first national examinations since the emergence of CfE. This changing policy context was often referred to when participants were noting the busy state of the school, including pupils, who were occupied with school work and revision for national examinations. Hence, one teacher commented, ‘if we were to implement RRSA now, it would not have succeeded’. Such a situation also emerged during the recruitment process,

where rejections for my request to undertake research were related to the curriculum changes.

‘Schools and teachers are facing significant demands on their time due to the implementation of the new curriculum and examination system.’

‘Unfortunately due to curricular commitments we are unable to help you with your research.’ (Extracted from e-mail correspondence with schools)

Furthermore, teachers indicated in the interviews that they were engaged in a number of extra-curricular responsibilities both within the school as well as out-of-school activities, from leading pupils on excursions to attending various events. A teacher thus expressed frustration when she could not attend regular RRSA steering group meetings due to her teaching duties. Other than that, a head teacher commented that the RRSA inspection process was onerous and had caused strain to the school’s daily operation. Even though the RRSA inspection was only a half-day event, teachers were nonetheless stressed in preparing for it. However, when they were being asked if they perceived that the RRSA has been imposing extra workload on them, they responded that it was their responsibility to design the curriculum for teaching so including the UNCRC in the curriculum was not seen as extra work to them. Nevertheless, they reported teacher resistance when the RRSA was first introduced due to the misunderstanding of the role of the UNCRC and the perceived increase in teachers’ and pupils’ workload.

Teachers were reported to be resisting the RRSA when it was first introduced since there were a number of initiatives that were on-going in the schools, and also the initiative was not well understood. For example, the RRSA was thought to be similar to some other initiatives such as Eco-Schools and Fair Trade Schools that would add more workload to the already busy teachers. Indeed, as commented by a teacher, the RRSA required more commitment from the whole school when compared to other initiatives. This might come into conflict with daily normal teaching, where a participant in school H commented that teaching was still her main job and the RRSA was an extra responsibility that she had taken up. Furthermore, a teacher reported that some ‘traditional’ teachers would think that the role of pupils should be sitting and listening to learn about the formal curriculum without too much distraction from extra-curricular activities. The RRSA was also resisted due to the teaching of the UNCRC, as some teachers thought that pupils should not know about their rights as that would give more power to the pupils. A teacher suggested that the teachers ‘were imagining that the kids would begin to run in the school, running riot that I

have got the rights to do that.’ It was reported that some pupils would say they had the right not to be educated but that did not emerge as a big issue for the teacher. Rather, as will be covered in the next section, the introduction of the RRSA has brought about positive changes in pupils’ behaviour. Hence, it was suggested that the fears around the RRSA such that it would add extra work and that pupils would be difficult to manage if the UNCRC was taught to them were unfounded.

Disengaged pupils were also seen as one of the challenges for fulfilling the RRSA criteria since all pupils ought to know about the UNCRC. Although some pupils were reported to be very keen and had shown their capacity to generate and execute ideas for RRSA, some participants expressed disappointment and disbelief when pupils were still ignorant of the RRSA and the UNCRC, despite the extensive efforts undertaken in relation to this initiative. Participants attributed this disengagement to the pupils’ background, which was supported by a head teacher’s statement that the prevalence of social inequality in Scotland had impacted pupil participation in school activities. Teachers were also very concerned about the well-being of pupils from a chaotic background and suggested that they were often not able to grasp the opportunities that were open to them. Furthermore, pupils were also reported to be questioning the necessity to get involved with the RRSA and other extra-curricular activities, a point of view that was also reported to be shared by some other teachers. On the other hand, the pupils who were responsible for the RRSA initiative were required to balance their time for formal learning against the work required for the RRSA. As the work for the RRSA required a lengthy period of time for the whole school consultation and for the ideas to be executed, some pupils might lose motivation due to diminishing passion and commitment. Hence, some teachers had to keep pupils motivated and follow up some good ideas.

Schools were also troubled by the strict RRSA qualifying criteria and restrictions. As the visual displays of the school charter and the UNCRC posters are one important element of the RRSA implementation to increase the awareness of the UNCRC, teachers in school H appeared to be quite distressed when the posters were being pulled down by construction workers since the century-old school building had to be protected from structural amendments. School C was particularly troubled with funding the materials required for raising the awareness of the RRSA and UNCRC such as flyers for businesses outside the school and an advertisement board. As commented by the participants from schools C and W, incorporation of the UNCRC in some subjects such as chemistry and

mathematics was seen as impossible. They suggested that the Level Two RRSA criteria should be amended to better suit the situation in secondary schools.

As explained in the literature review, schools were required not to link rights with responsibilities when teaching the UNCRC. Hence, it was a challenge for teachers to convey the right message to the pupils whilst making sure that other teachers were convinced that pupils would not misuse their rights after being taught about them. A teacher from school W, which achieved the Level One RRSA before the restriction was imposed, commented that she convinced teachers to adopt RRSA by saying that pupils would be taught rights with responsibilities in such a way that they would not misuse their rights. One teacher appeared to be struggling and worried to teach the fact that pupils do not need to be responsible for their actions in order to get their rights. Despite the many inconvenience of such restrictions, a teacher in school B commented that pupils would not misuse their rights since they wanted the school to be a good place. This was also supported by the fact that a teacher in school C commented that pupils themselves included the word responsibility when referring to the UNCRC language amongst themselves. Hence, to some teachers, this was not a major challenge.

Generally, teachers and head teachers perceived time constraints, teacher resistance, disengaged pupils and the demanding RRSA criteria as challenges to the RRSA implementation. Nevertheless, a depute head teacher in school C further commented that the benefits of the RRSA offset the challenges it introduced so the challenges were not a big problem to the school. Moreover, schools have various strategies to overcome these challenges which will be discussed in the next section.

#### **4.4.4 How did They Overcome the Challenges?**

The most common strategy to overcome the challenges was, as reported, taking more time for the RRSA to be expanded. Other than that, the RRSA coordinators used many different methods to persuade teachers to accept the RRSA and overcome the restriction posed by the RRSA when teaching the UNCRC.

In all schools, some teachers needed to be persuaded to accept the RRSA implementation and this could be done in a number of ways such as asking pupils to deliver CPD and taking time to change teachers' perception. A teacher in school W

commented that when the idea of the RRSA and its benefits were presented, teachers were more likely to listen to pupils than to listen to their colleagues. Other than that, the RRSA coordinators in school C tried to keep the teachers' workload for designing the UNCRC curriculum to the minimum to minimise teachers' resistance to the RRSA. While one teacher had the belief that there would always be some teachers who disagreed with the RRSA implementation no matter what, other participants from the same school expressed the confidence that these 'traditional' teachers would accept the RRSA eventually.

Finally, in response to the restriction of linking rights with responsibilities, a school replaced the word 'responsibility' with 'expectation' when teaching the UNCRC, rather than teaching pupils solely to assert their rights. This may be due to the fact that it was speculated that the usage of the word 'responsibility' in teaching rights was restricted since the term 'responsibility' was a legal term and it should not be used excessively. Nevertheless, this teacher demonstrated an accurate conception of rights such that rights are unconditional upon one's action and the only condition for the entitlement of rights is to be born. Other than the deliberate strategies to overcome the challenges of the RRSA, facilitating factors for such initiatives also contributed much to the successful RRSA implementation.

#### **4.4.5 What Helped?**

Scottish secondary schools received a variety of support internally and externally to implement the RRSA. Within the school, a supportive SMT and teachers, and enthusiastic pupils, were essential in supporting such an initiative. Externally, schools received financial and technical support from the local council, and ideas for the implementation from the other schools and UNICEF workshops.

As a requirement for the RRSA, the endorsement of the SMT was essential to show a school's commitment to the RRSA. Additionally, the support from the SMT was elaborated by the teachers as the major facilitating factor for the RRSA implementation. A supportive SMT was often characterised by leadership delegation where the SMT worked as a team, open to staff inputs and permissive to initiatives. One teacher in school C further noted, 'I perceive support from SMT, if I got rejected, I will still do it but the mentality is different.' Friendly and informal interactions between teachers and head teachers were observed in school C, where a teacher was called 'Miss Enthusiastic' who jokingly yelled

in the corridor asking the head teacher for more funding for the RRSA as observed during research visit. Mutual trust and confidence were observed between the participants of school W, where the RRSA coordinator's leadership ability was admired by the head teacher.

Committed teachers and a strong RRSA steering group made up of pupils were seen as very important for successful RRSA implementation. Participants were also very appreciative of the teachers who were not responsible for the RRSA but who helped in this initiative. Teachers also pointed out in the interviews that some pupils who had special talents such as web designing skills could contribute a lot to the RRSA. Some schools have particular advantages that helped the initiative. For example, school H had a registration period in their timetable such that pupils who were in the steering group could come out of their class during that period to attend the RRSA meetings. This facilitated regular meetings to support the RRSA implementation. Otherwise, some schools would only have several meetings a year during school holidays. The registration period also allowed class teachers to read out the 'rights of the week'.

Local councils provided support to the RRSA with funding such as innovation funds which were a great relief to school C which often required extra funding. They also provided recognition for the RRSA achievement by reporting this news in the local council newsletters. A Development Officer from LA2 was also reported to be very supportive to the RRSA by ensuring its quality and becoming involved in the RRSA inspection process. Other than that, school H had also sent pupils to school C to look at how the RRSA was implemented in that school and received support from that school. The pupils were reported to have returned with lots of ideas and excitement. Teachers in school C on the other hand, visited the first Scottish secondary school who received the RRSA to get ideas for the RRSA implementation. A teacher in school B obtained ideas from workshops organised by UNICEF. On a governmental level, GIRFEC was noted as a policy which was aligned well with the RRSA and a few interviewees mentioned CfE as a facilitator. Only one teacher mentioned AifL since the policy focused on self-evaluation.

#### **4.4.6 What Benefits Did They Recognise?**

All participants showed a favourable response towards the RRSA implementation without hesitation and would strongly recommend the RRSA implementation in other

schools. Only one teacher expressed hesitation when recommending the RRSA since the RRSA criteria was too demanding but the benefits of the RRSA were nevertheless recognised. The benefits of the RRSA were most noted for the introduction of rights into the schools. It had brought about a common goal and positive relationships in the schools that resulted in better behaviour, of pupils and teachers alike. However, the benefits of the RRSA were reported to be often mixed with other initiatives such as the introduction of a merit scheme and a change in the SMT. For example, the detention and exclusion rates in all schools had dropped after the RRSA implementation. However, school H participants acknowledged the fact that the rates were already decreasing and that teachers were already very respectful of the pupils before the RRSA was introduced while school B had introduced a new SMT, school blazers and a merit scheme when the RRSA was implemented. Similarly, school C was merged recently and the pupils who established groups according to their previous schools had gradually left the school. Nevertheless, this should not diminish the high probability that the RRSA might have played a significant role in making changes to the school culture and ethos.

The RRSA was reported to have increased pupils' and teachers' awareness of the UNCRC within each school. Previously, one teacher expressed the opinion that pupils might know their rights but might not know that the others' rights were equally important. This posed a number of implications for the schools as it encouraged dialogue between pupils and teachers. For example, a teacher reported that pupils would argue that teachers did not have the right to send pupils to detention. The RRSA steering group in school H came up with the idea of what should be done if a teacher used their mobile phone in a class. A similar story was found in school C where a teacher was told not to drink coffee in the class. Teachers on the other hand, could argue that pupils' misbehaviour had taken away other pupils' rights to education, such that the misbehaviour must be stopped within the framework of the UNCRC. A teacher in school C noted the significance of this since 'rights are absolute' and pupils could not argue against it. This was seen as a bargain or contract between teachers and pupils where both parties were required to uphold the school charter. In school C, pupils wished to be called 'students' instead of 'pupils'. Hence, a more positive relationship was cultivated and a change in school ethos was noted by participants in school C, where a deputy head teacher defined ethos as the:

'old fashion manners, opening the door, saying "thank you", saying "please", ... those are very small things but I think they make a big difference.' (Alicia, school C)

All these changes subsequently aided in behavioural improvement, where a head teacher commented that pupils were opened to communication when they were told off and that pupils would think twice before their action. He also noted that pupils would pick up litter as they were reported to have gained greater ‘ownership’ of the school. A teacher in school B also noted the improved consistency of pupils’ behaviour and further suggested,

‘we did previously have some challenges with the behaviour and then have some historical challenges ... I think that all of that has massively improved.’ (Penelope, school B)

The discrimination towards pupils with disability was reported by a teacher to be decreased in school C but two teachers in school H noted that such thing never existed and was seen as a facilitating factor for the successful RRSA implementation. A teacher in school H further commented that since the school charter was made by pupils as a result of school-wide consultation, pupils took on ownership of the charter and their own behaviour as a result. This ownership was also endorsed by another teacher where pupils should not challenge the consequences of their behaviour since they have chosen the charter.

Another notable benefit brought by the RRSA in schools B and C is that it introduced a common goal and a focus for the whole school to be united and to work upon, especially when school B had just introduced a new SMT and school C had been merged recently. In school H where there were a number of global citizenship initiatives, they were linked together and given a greater purpose with the RRSA. Moreover, in a big school like school H, a teacher felt that she had gained a better understanding of other staff members as she previously felt isolated in her own department and being the RRSA coordinator had allowed her to cooperate with other teachers. She subsequently discovered that many teachers in the school had been doing ‘an awful lot of global citizenship activities’ that she had not previously known about. A teacher from school B also noted the positive interactions between teachers,

‘even [the] most reluctant members of staff have gone on board with it to some certain extent and that’s always matter, in any school, umm trying to get everyone on board.’ (Grace, school B)

A teacher from school H also reported to have observed the attitude change of some sceptical teachers, when the school charters were displayed in their classrooms. Indeed, the teacher also reported a significant change in teachers’ perceptions after they saw the changes brought by the RRSA,

‘... strange enough the guy who was ... vociferously against it, just thought that was appalling: “You know the children just need to come and sit down and shut their faces and go on and on”, has actually come back to me and say “this is brilliant, [Katharine]. It’s absolutely brilliant.’ (Katharine, school H)

Achieving the RRSA also raised the school profile, as noted by teachers from schools C and W, since there was only small number of schools which had achieved this status. This also placed the schools ‘ahead of the game’ since the government was thought to have the intention to emphasise the UNCRC in schools and rights-respecting schools had done more than enough as commented by a participant. This achievement subsequently opened up partnerships and communications with other schools to exchange ideas about improving pupil voice and raising the awareness of the UNCRC to fulfil the RRSA criteria. Such improvement was said to be sustainable since the school was never perfect and new pupils could always bring in new ideas to the school.

The RRSA also opened up many opportunities for pupils to engage in extra-curricular activities and to show off their talents. The RRSA coordinator in school W established the RRSA steering group instead of using a pupil council as the steering group to allow more pupils to take leadership positions. Teachers across different schools were delighted to discover the pupils’ talents through the RRSA, where a pupil each in schools C and H had demonstrated web design skills for the RRSA website. A school C teacher particularly noted when she talked about the pupil,

‘we want them to do well in exam, we want them to progress but at the end of the day, if you are someone who’s particularly not that academic, not that academic, but is really good at something else, then we should encourage that and give them, and I think it gives some confidence and it gives some confidence when they leave the school... and it gives them an idea of what path they can go and where they want to go.’ (Eleanor, school C)

A teacher in school C expressed delight when pupils became involved in fundraising for charity events and donated money although the pupils themselves were not particularly well-off. Pupils were also opened to the chance to present the idea of the RRSA in front of head teachers and in a university, where it was suggested that such a task was daunting even to adults. Hence, the head teacher in school W expressed pride for pupils’ confidence in front of the adults,

‘if you meet with young people for I have had the young people who led the rights-respecting school, come along to parent council meetings and to parents’ event and share with the parents, how, you know, this approach and how they have taken it forward to school and I think that’s been very impressive with it as we can see the confidence of the youngsters have in terms of linking with adults. They do a remarkable job and they are very engaged in rights and responsibilities.’ (Andrea, school W)

In summary, the benefits of the RRSA were manifested when the UNCRC was widely known to teachers and pupils. This had brought about mutual respect in the schools and subsequently behavioural improvement. The RRSA had also given a chance for pupils to flourish and a focal point for schools on how they could be improved. Seeing so many benefits brought by the RRSA, what did schools hope to achieve in the future?

#### **4.4.7 What did They Hope to Do in the Future?**

Most of the participants responded to this question within the paradigm of the RRSA criteria such that the school would start acting as an ambassador for the RRSA and that both the RRSA and the UNCRC should be known better by every pupil and teacher for the Level Two RRSA. However, the RRSA coordinators in two schools recognised the fact that there was no Scottish secondary school which had achieved the Level Two RRSA because of the criterion that every subject should incorporate the UNCRC in its teaching content. Other than that, a teacher commented that further actions should be initiated by the pupils therefore she did not give a direction on what was going to happen in the school, as this practice was also encouraged by the RRSA. Nevertheless, she had a plan to introduce a pupil voice box after the Level One RRSA had been achieved. Some teachers had concrete ideas for future actions based on the recommendation stated in the RRSA inspection report. In accordance with that, teachers in school B would try to achieve gender equality in the RRSA steering group by recruiting more young male pupils. Some schools were planning to improve their pupil council by having more regular meetings and encouraging them to have a say in the school improvement plan, while a depute head teacher in school C found it unnecessary to have more pupil council meetings since the issues discussed were repetitive. Regarding the school improvement plan, school B intended to include pupil voice by using simpler language in the plan. The parent council and parental involvement

more generally were also mentioned across different interviews. No comment was volunteered on the fact that the inspection report requested pupils to memorise the article numbers of the UNCRC well.

#### **4.5 What did a Democratic School Mean to Them?**

All participants admitted to not having heard about, or having only a vague impression of ‘democratic schools’ and none of them referred to democratic schools as an alternative form of education. Their conception of a democratic school often revolved around the issues of pupil voice and parents’ voice in decision making, pupil councils, active participation in extra-curricular activities and global citizenship initiatives, while surprisingly few mentioned pupil choice over curriculum and rights. Opinions over pupils’ capacity to contribute to decision making in schools were rather mixed and reasons were given for such opinions. Positive conceptions of a democratic school were based on the benefits of pupil engagement and positive relationships while negative conceptions originated from the perceptions of pupils’ capabilities and adults’ duty of care for pupils’ safety.

In response to my interview question about the extent of democracy in their schools, the participants linked current school practices to a democratic school. A deputy head teacher commented that these practices existed before the introduction of the RRSA. Generally, the fact that the RRSA steering group was able to make decisions for the school was said to be democratic but this fact was only noted by one participant. The pupil council was said to be important in a democratic school as it involves elections and voting, where pupils learn to represent and to be represented. Democracy in schools to two participants also meant non-discriminatory practices and equal opportunities for activities such as school trips, where individual background was put aside when deciding which pupils could participate. Democratic practices, to some teachers, also meant that everyone has a vote over choices or being consulted such that everyone’s voice was being considered and acted upon.

One positive conception of a democratic school came from the fact that teachers had seen how pupils brought about changes in school ethos and that democratic voices allowed for the generation of new ideas. As a teacher pointed out, pupils should be listened to as it was important to build good relationship between teachers and pupils. Since the

RRSA implementation, a participant in school H recognised the importance of pupils' ideas in school improvement such that teachers and pupils should work together and listen to each other for the benefit of the school. Schools which focused on passive learning were seen as outdated and 'living in a dark age', in contrast to the majority of schools which had a focus on 'empowering the young people to help make a change... [and] help them to have the ownership of their learning'.

A few teachers across all schools except for school H commented that a fully democratic school occurred only in an ideal world, where pupils were rational and reasonable. Such a conception was based on the fact that pupils were reported to be not mature enough to make decisions and to understand what planning was. Part of it was due to the fact that pupils did not have a big picture in mind, which may be due to limited information held by the adults.

'...[S]ometimes I think umm a pupil is not always aware of the strategic and operational picture and so they may be don't always have the information that it can't always be given, the information on what you are doing and what you are going. They can't be given it, maybe they don't fully understand, you know. Sometimes, you know, sometimes we are dealing with children who are only twelve, you know, they are children.' (Lorna, school B)

It was also suggested that some pupils should have boundaries and that schools should be sensible when listening to them especially when pupils did not have boundaries due to their background. The teachers' voice was also said to have a level of professionalism when discussing the school improvement plan. A teacher also suggested that policy had to be listened to since a bigger picture of the nation should be taken into account.

'I think there should be a democratic practice but still you should listen to policy. I think they should work in parallel. I think there's a space for pupil voice and there's the space for, this is what we need to learn by umm be preparing ourselves for work, being ready for the world, it is structured like that so I think they should work with the policy.' (Adele, school H)

Other than that, adults were given a duty of care to the pupils, and the local council and the government had given a general direction to the school, which defined the adults' role and power that cannot be given away.

‘There are formal structures in the school that are run by the local authorities. They are the elected member, councils are the people who make the policies and to fundamentally determine the direction in schools umm and it’s not for me or for pupils in that matter to take that role on, a role that has to be involved in discussion and sharing of ideas, representing views and opinions in. So our elected members here in [LA2] can be in best position to make the correct decisions about education.’  
(Christopher, school H)

Nevertheless, this participant commented that Scottish schools were traditionally not democratic enough but were becoming more open. However, a democratic approach to school management was hard to sustain when pupils’ safety had to be taken into account. For example, scarves and wearing a pink shirt to school C for charity purposes were banned as pupils were required to wear uniforms and to show their school ties when coming to their school for identification and safety reasons since the school was located within housing estates. Nevertheless, these issues were being negotiated to reach a win-win solution, which showed a democratic approach to controversial issues. Issues that were bound by finance and physical structures such as school layout and bus stop location had also enforced restrictions on some decisions.

#### **4.5.1 Democratic Classroom**

The responses towards the conception of a democratic classroom were more wide-ranging than those of a democratic school. The most common responses were related to building a positive relationship, group work and individual pupils’ learning experiences. Similar to the conceptualisation of a democratic school, voting over teaching content was commonly referred to as an example of democratic practices in classrooms. Teachers reported that by giving pupils choices over learning activities would contribute to classroom ethos since pupils did not like curriculum being prescribed. Some participants conceptualised a democratic classroom teaching as giving enjoyable learning experiences such that the teaching content was fun and interesting that could in turn promote active learning and positive relationships.

‘...[T]eaching is all about relationship, positive relation, listen to them and then make my subject which is French and German come to life through being lively

and they would be [...] actively learning, particularly the younger ones, [...] doing things and [...] taking ownership I would say.’ (Sean, school C)

Teaching evaluation was said to help improve teaching and this could be done with surveys or interviews. Such practice was dependant on individual departments in school B while in school C this was done in exercise books in reference to the RRSA. This practice was also said to be essential for pupils who were sitting national examinations as teachers could reflect on their teaching practice.

Individual learning experiences were also possible where pupils work on their individual profile. However, as noted by a teacher, curriculum personalisation was only available to pupils with special educational needs while other pupils were given choice over subjects. Democratic classroom teaching also related to group experience and a supportive environment for individual learning. For example, a teacher reported using group points in teaching so that pupils understand their role in a group and pupils were asked to support others’ learning by giving positive comments.

‘So my lessons [...] will be taken out in an activity if you are seen fighting with someone else, rolling your eyes and making past judgement and pass the comments with others because there’s no base for a pupil to confident to be creative in an environment that’s not inclusive in this room...’ (Adele, school H)

In a more general picture, teachers in recent times were said to be more democratic since they would act in harmony with the class consensus. However, as a depute head teacher pointed out, democratic classrooms were harder in upper year groups since the teaching content is not so flexible due to national examinations. Other than that, a teacher from the same school also commented that using a democratic approach was harder in some subjects and in challenging classrooms where misbehaviour is a serious issue. Hence, the feasibility of a democratic classroom is highly dependent on the individual teacher and the context. A teacher participant who admitted being ‘old fashioned’ gave her opinion that pupils should be sitting exams and listen to teachers to suit a bigger national picture. A teacher also reported that she decided what she wanted the class to learn instead of allowing pupils to choose. Nevertheless, a democratic classroom was said to have encouraged more dialogue and decreased conflict so that pupils were not afraid to admit mistakes and confusion over teaching content, where a teacher noted,

‘There’s been democratic and more dialogue, less conflict, happier children, happier staff, learn more and learn better if you like ... It’s a nicer atmosphere to

learn, therefore, you are more relaxed, so you can take things in ... ask questions if you are not sure, if you don't understand you don't get into trouble by for saying, "I don't understand it." You only get into trouble for not saying you don't understand it, if you like.' (Eleanor, school C)

Finally, similar to a democratic school, a democratic classroom was also related to a non-discriminatory approach to pupils' past behaviour and giving credit to pupils' performance regardless of their previous misbehaviour.

## 4.6 Summary

The main findings collated from document collection and interview responses were presented extensively in this chapter. It first described the characteristics and backgrounds of the four participating schools and their pupil councils, including their operations and issues discussed. Three of the schools investigated initiated the RRSA via top-down approaches from the SMT and in one exceptional case via a bottom-up approach where a probationary teacher and pupils initiated it. When implementing the RRSA, these schools have introduced the UNCRC into school charters, curriculum designs, school improvement plans and charity events. Other than that, changes were made in behavioural policies and pastoral care services whereas a pupil voice box was established to improve pupil welfare. These implementations were student-led with some degree of teacher guidance. For example, pupils reported to have delivered CPD in order to convince teachers to accept the RRSA.

When implementing these initiatives, schools faced challenges of time constraints and resistance from teachers and pupils. The strict RRSA qualifying criteria and restrictions were also listed as one of the challenges. The RRSA implementation required the support from the SMT, teachers and enthusiastic pupils, plus some external support from school partnerships, local councils and UNICEF workshops. Teachers and head teachers recognised that positive relationships, better behaviours and raised school profiles were the benefits of the RRSA, though these effects might have been, to some extent, influenced by other initiatives in the schools. They also expressed that they would continue improving their schools by following the RRSA criteria and recommendations in the RRSA inspection reports.

The participants expressed many different conceptions of democratic schools and the majority of them commented that a democratic school should allow pupils to have a voice that is being acted upon. A democratic school was thought to be beneficial as it encourages positive relationships but at the same time it was rather difficult since pupils were reported not being mature enough to make decisions and that some responsibilities must be carried out by the adults. Similarly, the conceptualisation of a democratic classroom was diverse. It was related to positive relationships, group work and individual pupils' learning experiences. These findings will be discussed in the subsequent chapter in relation to the definition of a democratic school as described earlier.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

Taking the results from the previous chapter, the similarities and differences between my findings and those of other research will be noted in this chapter. Then, the key concepts and issues which the findings point to, including national policies, pupil maturity and the role of schools as educational providers will be explored. Under each heading, the possibilities and limitations for schools to respect individual rights and to promote equal responsibilities in school management between adults and children will be considered. In addition, the issues of behavioural management and collective decision making in schools will be considered since they could potentially hinder schools from being 'democratic'. Finally, this chapter ends by summarising the discussion.

### 5.1 Triangulation

Certain key similarities were found between the main findings of this study and those of other reports despite the differences between contexts. In particular, the benefits of the RRSA were frequently identified as decreased exclusion and detention rates, positive relationship, the awareness of others' rights, an improvement in school ethos and a better behavioural management. Likewise, the challenges of the RRSA implementation emerges around teacher resistance and the prioritisation of national examinations (Covell & Howe, 2005; Sebba & Robinson, 2009). However, school C stated that financing the RRSA was the biggest challenge despite previous reports that suggested that the RRSA required only minimum amounts of funding. School partnerships and using the RRSA as the umbrella for other school initiatives were also present in some of the investigated schools. Teachers' familiarity with national policies and pupil councils was also similar across different contexts, while voluntary reference to national policies remained limited, and respondents had difficulties in articulating the content of relevant policy documents and issues around pupil councils (Osler, 2000; Whitty & Wisby, 2007). From an international perspective, the conception of a democratic school bears similarity to the definition given by Pakistani school principals as reported by Davies (1999), since democracy to some of my participants means participation in extra-curricular activities and choice.

The triangulation of the results above suggests the consistency of my findings with those undertaken across different contexts. This may suggest the reproducibility of the results in different policy contexts and level of schooling. Nevertheless, such consistency may be due to similarities between the two contexts in culture and the fact that teachers had read and agreed on the RRSA reports. This nevertheless has shown that the previous reports are important to act as a source and evidence in convincing teachers what to be expected when implementing the RRSA in schools, other than possessing academic value for scholarly debates. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Trivers & Starkey (2012), '[human rights education] initiatives evaluated were situated in prosperous and culturally relatively homogeneous areas' (p. 143) such that its implementation in other nations should proceed with caution.

## **5.2 The National Examination and Curriculum Context**

This section discusses the possibilities and limitations of the national examinations framework in promoting democracy in schools. As discussed in the literature review, there has been recent change in Scottish educational policy with a greater focus on citizenship education asserted in CfE. Such change, together with the greater flexibility and autonomy given to schools has opened up the possibility for the introduction of the RRSA such that schools could utilise these opportunities for a more democratic approach in school management. However, a change in the national policy also limited democracy in the schools investigated as teachers were stressed by the change in the national examinations format, coinciding with the period of research.

### **5.2.1 Possibilities**

The participants perceived support from the local council and agreed that the RRSA was easier to be implemented in Scotland when compared to England as the Scottish Government was supportive to such an initiative. Indeed, the flexibility given by the recent government policies to the local councils in funding allocation, to schools in making decisions on timetabling and to teachers for their professionalism in designing teaching content, has allowed schools to have a certain degree of democratic space and innovation

to experiment with a number of different initiatives (MacBeath, 2013). The targeted schools in this research were hence open to initiatives such as implementing the RRSA using a top-down approach within a school, which originates from the SMT, while at the same time allowing changes from the bottom-up. The areas of responsibility for school management which traditionally lay with the SMT's, such as behavioural policy, timetable and school rules, were increasingly shared by both teachers and pupils.

More importantly, the citizenship aspect of the national policy has been the initiator of the RRSA in most schools investigated and was perceived to have been facilitated by an effective funding allocation and technical support from the local council. In terms of the national curriculum, assessments using portfolios and pupils' rich extra-curricular activities were recognised by teachers as democratic practices in schools since pupils were able to express their diversity in learning styles and talents. The recognition of the RRSA and extra-curricular activities in school newsletters as well as in the local council newsletters has encouraged schools and pupils to pursue more extra-curricular activities. Moreover, the RRSA has opened a way for teachers to change their way of thinking which might be more effective than the policy documents since the teachers who were responsible for implementing the RRSA were more familiar with the RRSA criteria than with the policy documents. Therefore, the flexibility, the focus on citizenship education and the involvement of the local authority in funding the schools were the features of Scottish educational policy that facilitated democratic practices in schools which could perhaps be taken up by other policy makers.

### **5.2.2 Limitations**

Nevertheless there were many limitations posed by the national policy on democratic practices in schools, particularly through increasing teachers' workload. During the field work of this study, the impact of educational policy change with the introduction of CfE in 2008 could be felt strongly in the schools as it was frequently reported there had been a significant increase in teachers' workload and stress in preparing the first batch of pupils who were affected by the new national examinations. This has highlighted the importance of national examinations in schools, where a significant effort was devoted to maximising academic performance and their results were being prioritised in school improvement plans. This is similar to how significant Scottish teachers and pupils

perceived exam taking to be in a report by Hamilton & Brown (2005). Hence, it is not surprising that Swann & Brown (1997) suggested that the change in standardised assessments might be the only strategy of policy documents that could have significant potential to change teachers' thinking.

The increase of teachers' and pupils' workload had a number of implications for democratic practices in classrooms since, as reported by Plank & Condliffe (2013), teachers were more likely to use authoritarian approaches in classrooms to prepare pupils for national examinations. Other than that, teacher burnout as a result of increased workload was found to decrease the positive perception of democratic school environments (Dworkin, et al., 2003). Furthermore, despite the schools' efforts in promoting the RRSA and extra-curricular activities, some pupils and teachers were reported to have regarded these as additional to normal class teaching. Schools' commitment to pupil councils and extra-curricular achievement hence runs the risk of being side-lined or addressed as a tick box exercise for the national policy (Deuchar, 2003) or for the RRSA requirement when compared to the importance of academic results.

As argued by Apple (1993), certain forms of knowledge and its progression have been privileged in the mainstream education due to the presence of national curriculum and examination systems since they were set up to have standards of achievement for pupils. This has caused schools to exclude some very specific knowledge such as aerodynamics which pupils in alternative schools were able to study in their own time (Gribble, 2014). Hence, there is not democracy in knowledge or pupils' individual rights to learn in mainstream schools. Compulsory schooling, if it only privileges certain progression and knowledge set up by the national curriculum, could potentially continue the vicious cycle of a socially disadvantaged population as schools become regarded as middle class institutions requiring obedience and high level usage of language in classrooms, which might be more challenging for some working class children to keep up with the learning pace (Slavin & Davis, 2006). As a result, they may be left out and excluded from quality education, similar to Castro's (2000) argument that 'the right to education, seen simply as the right to access to school, became then the social form of legitimising exclusion' (p. 3, as quoted in McCowan, 2010).

Furthermore, over-focusing on national examinations as the goal of education could, as argued by Harber (2004), infringe other rights such as rights to protection from psychological harm since those who cannot catch up with the progress of the curriculum are pressured to perform better. Furthermore, for a few pupils who could perform above

the norm set by the guidelines in the national curriculum, they were not expected to progress further (Swann & Brown, 1997). This could potentially harm those who are gifted or those performing just under the definition of gifted individuals. These observations have suggested that pupils' diversity in progression was not respected and individual rights to education and development were infringed due to national examinations and curriculum frameworks.

### **5.3 Pupils' Maturity**

There were a number of responses regarding pupil's maturity in making decisions for schools in the discussion of democratic practices. There were both positive and negative views towards pupil's maturity that opened up and limited the possibility of schools in becoming more democratic respectively.

#### **5.3.1 Possibilities**

The RRSA has opened up opportunities for pupils to actively participate in school activities and management, which may potentially make pupils' capability of making rational decisions more visible and subsequently push schools to be more democratic (Ross, et al., 2007). Indeed, some teachers recognised pupils' ability in generating and executing ideas for the RRSA. A support teacher was particularly delighted to report that their teachers and pupils were sharing ideas when both parties were learning to implement the RRSA. This was regarded as a democratic practice since ideas were respected regardless of the person's background. Moreover, some participants were impressed and proud of the fact that pupils could speak confidently in front of adults when they were taking up the ambassadorial role for the RRSA presenting the idea of the RRSA in front of head teachers and university students. This is indeed one of the alternative democratic school students' characteristics. In addition, some school charters showed that there were shared roles and responsibilities between teachers and pupils which could potentially increase the awareness of their equality despite having different identities.

### **5.3.2 Limitations**

However, it is worrying that only one teacher expressed her confidence that pupils genuinely wanted their school to be a good place when considering the challenge of teaching the UNCRC in schools. In fact, her colleagues within the school as well as the participants from the other schools cast doubt on pupils' maturity in planning and making the best decision for the school. In fact, whenever the participants had a negative conception or had the perception that a democratic school only occurs in an ideal world, doubts about pupils' rationality and capability were the recurring explanation for such views. This has implications to how the issues raised by the pupils were dealt with as will be discussed in the next section.

Furthermore, as argued by some scholars, children's capability in decision making was developed by their participation in making decisions, which in turn became a circular argument that their participation should be based on their capability (Ross, et al., 2007). Nevertheless, pupil leadership training in school C was reported, which showed the school's effort in improving their pupil council (Taylor & Johnson, 2002). This may be beneficial for the running and the autonomy of the pupil council in the long run. However, similar to the limitation of the pupil council in empowering individual pupils, this training was only limited to a small number of pupils while those who were not trained might not be given the opportunity to participate in the pupil council. This approach will tend to favour representative democracy rather than a richer form of deliberative democracy (Gutmann 1999).

## **5.4 Schools as Educational Providers**

Schools can be effective providers of rights and fulfil the Scottish Government's commitment to the UNCRC. This is because schools can provide education and health services, including pastoral care and nutritious meals for children. The RRSA programme has encouraged schools to practice the UNCRC more explicitly as observed in this study as they documented the evidence of implementing the RRSA for the purpose of inspection.

### 5.4.1 Possibilities

Indeed, the schools involved in this study have made their best effort in upholding the UNCRC especially for Article 42 of the UNCRC, where rights must be made known to all children (UNICEF, 2012), despite the many challenges from teachers' resistance and disengaged pupils. Other than that, schools have, based on the RRSA documents, reflected on their pastoral care services to ensure children's health and well-being were well-maintained.

There were a number of pupil surveys and focus groups done to consult them when making decisions on school infrastructure, reward systems and the school charter. This is recommended by the RRSA in upholding Article 12 of the UNCRC of respecting the views of the child, although the methods may run the risk of being too prescriptive (UNICEF, 2012). School charters and pupil councils also acted as a tool to channel complaints from pupils about and make changes to teachers' misbehaviour and school infrastructure. In addition, parents and pupils were being consulted when deciding the design and the content of school charters. This follows the guidelines of the UNCRC that parental views must be taken into consideration when making decisions that affect the children (UNICEF, 2012). Moreover, some schools abolished punishment exercises and detention, although the local council had imposed a behavioural policy for schools, as teachers were said to not have the right to punish pupils. These have shown that pupils are sharing responsibility with the adults to change school rules and behavioural management other than upholding their rights to have their views considered. Nevertheless, using the UNCRC to discipline pupils is controversial among academic scholars and it will be discussed in the following section.

There were instances where pupils could help fulfil others' rights and solve problems in the schools investigated. A good example was found in school H where a pupil was reported to have raised funds through a bake sale for her self-initiated overseas volunteering. In school B, pupils were reported to have organised a mental health awareness campaign in conjunction with the Youth Leadership Award for promoting Article 18 of the UNCRC relating to children's well-being (UNICEF, 2012). Pupils in school W were also reported to have delivered CPD to convince teachers to accept the RRSA implementation. As the ambassadors of the RRSA, pupils in school C gave talks to adults in a university as well as in a local council-wide head teacher meeting. These were the examples that pupils share the responsibility of upholding rights of the other children and delivering a development service to teachers in schools.

On the other aspect of a democratic school in sharing school management responsibility, the equality among teachers and pupils in school improvement could be improved with the initiative from the RRSA despite the fact that such motivation is bounded by the RRSA. This school improvement can be seen from two models of bottom-up approach, which are from a teacher level to an SMT level and from a pupil level to a teacher level. The former can be seen from the fact that the initiation of the RRSA in school C was brought about by a probationary teacher who made a suggestion to the SMT to implement the RRSA in order to improve citizenship education. On the other hand the bottom-up approach for school improvement from the pupil level in the same school was observed when new pupils were involved in the sustainability of the RRSA by contributing ideas for the RRSA implementation from their prior experience in rights-respecting primary schools. Hence in this school the new pupils were the resources for the citizenship initiatives since they were trained well in their primary school (Ross & Brown, 2013).

Furthermore, some schools also exhibited the momentum in promoting equality in school management from top-down approaches as some teachers reported that some school administration work such as staff appointments and school improvement plans were being considered to consult pupils. The fact that pupils were asked to deliver CPD due to the perception that teachers were more easily convinced by pupils than by their colleagues has shown that pupil voice has significant power. A deputy head teacher has also identified that teachers and their disengagement from work were the potential source of pupils' misbehaviour, indicating her sympathy and her perception that pupils were not the only ones to blame for the problems in the school. This resonates with another head teacher's perception that Scottish schools were becoming more democratic from a position of being traditionally undemocratic. Finally, with the increased communication and teachers' sympathy to disengaged pupils, it was possible that the rights of the disadvantaged pupils could be fulfilled with a more specific treatment.

#### **5.4.2 Limitations**

There were a number of limitations of schools being the educational providers in respecting individual rights and giving equal share of responsibility for school management to pupils. This was because the pupils were allowed to assert their rights collectively as far as the situation allowed and agreed. For example, complaints channelled

through either the pupil council or the pupil voice box and demands that arose through these channels were met to a certain extent. Some bottom-up changes were restricted due to financial and physical constraints but there were also cases where the adults used their judgement to veto the significance and accuracy of the issues raised in these ways. These were seen as the instances where pupils should be educated and trained well before they could use their voice and they should also respect and agree with the adults' views. Furthermore, pupils' maturity was also frequently cast into doubt in relation to their ability to make decisions according to the bigger picture of the school and to plan for the best interest of the school, which might be due to the fact that some information was held only by the adults. When the children's maturity in forming an opinion was questioned, it sat uncomfortably with the conception that children are 'citizens now' (Deuchar, 2006), rather than citizens in waiting.

This conception of pupils' immaturity, as discussed earlier in the literature review, is similar to the language of the UNCRC in Article 12 that the child's maturity should be taken into consideration when making decisions that affect the children (UNICEF, 2012). Hence, to what extent the children's opinions could be considered by the adults remained ambiguous as adults' judgement of children's ability to form their mature opinions is the basis of the entitlement of such rights (Gadda, 2008). This is further supported with the conception that teachers' opinions ought to be considered in school development plans since they were regarded as possessing a certain level of professionalism. This, together with the selective issues that could be raised by the pupils, runs the risk that the respect for pupils' rights is conditional upon the respect for adults' judgement and agreement since the adults were regarded to be more mature and more capable of making the best decisions. Hence, the introduction of the UNCRC into schools may potentially reinforce the power structure between adults and children since the distinction of the staff members' and pupils' roles was strengthened instead of promoting a more equal share of responsibility.

Other than the limitations inherent in the UNCRC language, the language of policy documents is also problematic. For example, pupils were passively referred to when the duties of the schools were stated in the policy documents,

'The process of recognising broad achievements should be able to continue cumulatively up to the point when a young person leaves school with achievements captured in a way that is valued by young people, their parents, employers and colleges and universities.' (SEED, 2006, p. 18)

Furthermore, a participant also noted that the duty of care was decided by the local council such that certain powers could not be taken away from the adults. The duty of care is hence another source of inequality between children and adults where their responsibilities were defined; here adults were the service providers and the problem solvers for any unsatisfactory educational service, while children were the receivers and consumers of rights and education. Thus, pupil participation in behavioural management, school budget allocation and collective safety was yet to be improved in these schools to achieve an equally shared responsibility between children and adults. This implies that adults should release their responsibility as a provider and should transfer greater ownership to pupils to be the problem solvers.

The defined teachers' role has implications for the teachers' perceptions of democratic classrooms since the responsibility for teaching and learning was not shared equally in a classroom. In the interview discussions of democratic classrooms, teachers were confident that they were democratic since they were teaching democratic values and getting input from the pupils for their teaching practice using evaluation of teaching rather than sharing the responsibility of teaching and designing classroom content with pupils. This is hence similar to the conception of a democratic school, where pupils were allowed to have their voice being heard in classrooms. Consultation on school management and classroom teaching was conceivable but shared responsibility was yet to be improved.

Finally, the selective emphasis on rights that was evident in the schools investigated was problematic. Rights were upheld according to school members' preference since not all UNCRC articles were related to school settings. Rights to education were seen as more important than the other rights in schools as a result. This was similar to what was reported by Harber (2004) that rights to education could be over-emphasised such that other important rights, such as rights to safety and health, were neglected. Schools as educational providers could have hindered the rights-respecting schools from being democratic since not all rights were upheld and the defined adults' responsibilities in school management and safety were not shared with pupils equally.

Indeed, schools were in many ways similar to the role of the government of a nation in fulfilling the citizens' or the children's basic need for the sake of their rights. However, the major difference was that the make-up of the school government was only opened to adults but not children. It was inconceivable for children to struggle for their rights and to topple the school government. In this era in which citizens are encouraged to take radical moves towards democracy and to participate in upholding social justice for

deliberative democracy, such school systems do not seem to fit such intentions (Gutmann, 1999). The struggle for rights, suggested by Trivers & Starkey (2012) as being the important understanding of human rights, could not be learned practically unless pupils were empowered to share the responsibility of school management with the adults, not be mere passive consumers of education.

### **5.4.3 Behavioural Management**

The teaching of the UNCRC in schools through the RRSA was questioned by Trivers & Starkey (2012) as focussing on behavioural management rather than facilitating critical citizenship education where rights should be taught as ‘something to be won through struggle’ (p. 144). This is because instead of pupils asserting their rights, school charters were used to discipline pupils such that a pupil was said to have taken others’ rights away if they caused disruption in a classroom so they should stop their misbehaviour. Pupils were also taught to differentiate needs and wants, and to look at the disadvantages experienced by people in other parts of the world so they could feel more grateful for their own circumstances. Other than that, in the schools investigated, school charters were seen to have replaced the school rules and to act as a contract between pupils and teachers for both parties to commit themselves to uphold the UNCRC. Therefore, teachers could argue that the pupils had chosen the school charter design in the first place and that they should therefore adhere to it whenever there was a breach in the school charter. Although the principal intention of the schools in this study in implementing the RRSA was not primarily related to behavioural management, it remained an attractive aspect of the RRSA and a tool to convince teachers who resisted the RRSA due to the fear of pupil ‘riot’ and misbehaviour as a result of the implementation. Hence, when the UNCRC was required by the RRSA not to be taught with the emphasis on responsibility, it was replaced with the word ‘expectation’ instead of moving pupils towards the assertion of rights and schools away from using the UNCRC for disciplining pupils. Rights were still educated in such a way that conforms with and reinforces the role of schools as educational providers, to teach a national curriculum and the role of pupils as the receivers, to ‘sit down and learn’.

From another perspective, behavioural management is indeed very important for schools to decrease exclusion rates and to manage challenging behaviour, which was said to have been a problem for the running of some schools. Therefore, using the UNCRC as a

useful tool for solving problems of the schools should never be underestimated since that had brought about many beneficial changes in the schools. This could mean a better learning experience and ethos in the schools. For example, a head teacher commented that ownership of the school was felt by the pupils since they would pick up litter whenever they came across some in the corridor and hence the school had a very clean environment when I visited. Furthermore, as suggested by Evans (2005), 'where discourse is grounded in rational reflection, students develop greater self-esteem and engagement [and] also benefit cognitively through engagement in higher-level reasoning' when compared to 'modes of discipline based on positional authority' and force (p. 59). By using the language of the UNCRC in school charters, despite their similarity to school rules, pupils were opened up to a chance 'to reflect on situations with a degree of objectivity' (Evans, 2005, p. 59). This could potentially explain a teacher's comment that pupils' behaviour had become more consistent since the introduction of the RRSAs.

However, in some alternative democratic schools, behavioural problems were reported as not being a serious concern in the classrooms (Greenberg & Sadofsky, 1992; Neill, 1968). This was explained that since lessons were optional, students could engage in the activities they are interested in instead of misbehaving in a classroom. If school rules were breached by their misbehaviour, they would be sanctioned by their peers and their actions were not taken personally in the school meetings or school court. It was also reported that they would accept the sanctions since they agreed on the school rules. If there was dissatisfaction with the punishment, negotiations were sought out to seek for the best solution. Students were also reported to self-regulate since they wished to be accepted by their peers (Gray & Chanoff, 1986). This is in contrast to the situation in mainstream schools, where pupils break rules to seek attention from their peers (Slavin & Davis, 2006). Hence, how alternative democratic schools tackled behavioural management could serve as an inspiration for educational stakeholders, taking the origins of and motivation for misbehaviour into consideration.

#### **5.4.4 Collective Decision Making**

As discovered in the interviews, schools C and H consulted pupils, parents and teachers when deciding the organisation of the timetable and how many subjects should be taken by each pupil respectively. Despite pupil input, pupils remain deprived of individual

freedom in choosing how many subjects to learn and in planning for their own time. Hence the freedom of children in self-determination and autonomy on which knowledge to obtain is limited due to the constraints imposed by the schools and the national curriculum, as suggested by Vinson (1999). Teachers could also be affected by the timetabling since it has also posed restrictions on their level of commitment to the RRSA since some teachers could not attend RRSA meetings due to their teaching duty.

Additionally, although teachers recognised the fact that pupils have different talents shown through the RRSA implementation and that they learn in diverse ways and pace, this may not be recognised by the SMT. Many teacher participants noticed pupils' contribution to school improvement and confidence when speaking to adults especially the new pupils, who have contributed ideas from their primary school experience. However, a member of the SMT still cast doubt on new pupils' maturity in planning and decision making for the school. Such a situation may not be helpful towards democracy in schools, where the SMT, especially for those who focus very much on the statistics and equality of pupils' academic results in national examinations, is responsible for making final and collective decisions after collating responses from different parties.

The unequal distribution of responsibility and power in decision making between teachers and the SMT also mirrors the situation between pupils and teachers, where pupils were subjected to teachers' final and collective decisions on learning content in a classroom. This unequal distribution of power and responsibility was further supported by the introduction of some school charters, which have further defined the adults' and pupils' roles in the schools, such that adults should be teaching while pupils were required to attend lessons and do homework. Hence, collective decision making in schools and in classrooms, although perceived by the participants to be democratic since it involved pupil consultation, is not fully democratic since pupils cannot make decisions on learning content, thus not respecting individual rights to learn and not sharing the responsibility for learning and teaching equally.

## **5.5 Summary**

The discussion above has illustrated the effectiveness of rights-respecting secondary schools in upholding the UNCRC but at the same time problematized the role of schools as educational providers and the equal treatment to pupils who are the consumers

of education rather than the owners of their own learning. Indeed, the schools investigated had promoted pupils' welfare by providing pastoral care service, a channel for pupil voice, and support for their studies. On some issues, adults were the problem solvers for the unsatisfactory service instead of pupils participating in problem solving, especially when it involved financial boundaries and safety issues. This situation mirrors the conception that teachers were the 'entertainers' of the pupils such that pupils were not responsible for their own learning (Swartz, 1974). This was coupled with the perception that pupils were not capable of planning and making good decisions such that certain responsibilities and duties fell within the hands of the few, that is, the adults, though they were given much greater flexibility and power to make decisions. Although senior pupils were regarded as more mature than new pupils, they were reported to be so busy preparing for national examinations that pupil council meeting minutes could not be done by those pupils. Coupled with teacher professionalism and the perception that junior pupils were not capable of planning and making decisions, Scottish secondary schools were in an awkward position for pupils to be empowered. Furthermore, it could be argued that with the support from the UNCRC language and Scottish national policies, the adults' power over children has to a certain extent deprived children of their rights to have their views respected in the event that children were thought not to be mature enough to have their views considered fully and that the best decisions for the schools have to be made.

At the governmental level, a fixed standard in national examinations and a defined progress on a national curriculum framework has taken away the children's individual rights and freedom to learn as they affect classroom teaching and the decision making for the whole school. Schools and classrooms were still making collective decisions on individual learning experience even though they were given the flexibility in deciding the organisation of the timetable and the number of subjects to be taught. Pupils and teachers were confined in classrooms following the timetable and national curriculum for the subjects that they had to choose and to teach respectively. Together with the schools' over-focusing on pupils' performance on national examinations, these constraints have made the respect for individual rights awkward in schools as pupils were not able to choose where, when, what, how, and from whom to learn. It should be recognised that any national examinations framework is likely to be undemocratic in nature as it privileges certain styles of learning, knowledge and progression without respect for pupil diversity and individual freedom (Apple, 1993; Vinson, 1999). Hence in the following chapter, with the risk of over-simplifying issues, several suggestions are made from the researcher's point of

view that could potentially facilitate mainstream schools' progression towards providing a more comprehensive democratic education.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This chapter brings together the literature review, main findings and discussion of this research. It begins by describing what I have learned throughout the research, then summarises the findings and recapitulates the issues discussed in the previous section. Next, the limitations of this research are laid out before highlighting the implications of this research for different educational stakeholders. Finally, this chapter ends by concluding the contribution of this study and suggesting future research that could be done in relation to the issues discovered.

### **6.1 What I have Learned as a Researcher**

Through this journey of research, I have learnt a lot as a researcher from the knowledge content as well as the soft skills required. I would like to describe my experience in terms of the perspectives gained, skills obtained and moral values adopted. In terms of the perspectives gained, I have experienced Scottish education and also the shift of my own conception of democratic education, from focusing on alternative schools to mainstream schools. The shift was due to the practicalities of this research and also to enhance the transferability of the research results in other context. Therefore, conducting research on mainstream schools was more feasible than on alternative schools. Indeed, having looked at the rights-respecting schools, I see that democratic education in mainstream schools is possible within limits, with a stronger pupil voice and flexibility in the national curriculum. When visiting Scottish schools and learning about the educational system through the participants' eyes, I was impressed by the teachers' and pupils' friendliness to each other and their helpfulness to a stranger like me. Pupils' range of extra-curricular activities in the schools also impressed a cultural outsider like me a lot.

For the skills obtained, I learned how to conduct semi-structured interviews effectively as I realised I was better at asking relevant questions while at the same time maintaining conversation flow and building rapport with the participants. I was much more confident and became less nervous towards the end of the data collection period. I learned to be tactful when disagreement arose between the participants and me. Within the

academic circle, I learned to argue reasonably and rationally while minimising my own bias in the scholarly debate. I have also demonstrated resilience and tenacity whenever unexpected situations occurred and solved them effectively within time limits. I was also delighted to put my analytic and reflective skills to the test during interpreting and presenting my findings. The writing up process was also surprisingly challenging to me since I had to learn how to convey my messy ideas and message effectively. From this I also generated new ideas which excited me a lot. I have also come to understand the determination and discipline required by researchers in producing rigorous academic work. These skills and knowledge are important for my future research especially as I am determined to become an academic researcher.

As a researcher, I have satisfied my thirst for knowledge and wisdom. During this process, I learned to be humble, not only to the academic scholars' depth of knowledge and arguments but also to the participants, no matter how much time they have spent teaching as a teacher. I have met young teachers who have passion in improving the school through the RRSA and I was also truly impressed by some teachers having dedicated their whole life in education. It was interesting to observe the friendly and informal relationship between head teachers, teachers and pupils when I was visiting the schools. Having close contact with so many teachers and learning about their perspectives in a short amount of time was a new and exciting experience to me that I will cherish as an early career researcher. The moral value of humbleness has definitely taught me to continue learning and chasing wisdom.

## **6.2 How have the Research Questions been Answered?**

This section will discuss how each research question has been or has not been answered with the empirical findings.

- To what extent do Scottish Rights-respecting secondary schools have the features of a 'democratic school'?

The schools investigated were found to have respect for individual rights and equal share of responsibility in school management within limitations. As reported in the main findings, schools reflected their pastoral care service and the workings of their pupil councils when implementing the RRSA. However, the schools upheld rights to education

for behavioural management but less so for individual pupils' rights to decide how, when, what, where and with whom to learn. On the other hand, some issues which were traditionally the adults' responsibilities such as school improvement plans and staff appointments were being considered to consult pupils. Nevertheless, the adults were still the decision makers after collating the responses from pupils, teachers and parents rather than allowing equal vote for each stakeholder. Learning content was also decided by the teachers rather than by the pupils but welcomed pupils' input in teaching evaluation and allowed choices in some occasions. Nevertheless, this answer for this research question is rather bounded with what could be derived from school documents and interview responses. Participant-observation on classroom teaching and on school grounds may give a different picture to my answer.

- What are the teachers' and head teachers' perceptions of a 'democratic school' and to what extent are they aiming to provide a 'democratic' education?

Despite the variation in responses, most teachers' and head teachers' conceptualisation of a democratic school was bounded by pupils having a voice that was acted upon. There were also mixed responses over the desirability of a democratic school. Positive comments on a democratic school were based on the fact that it could promote positive relationships and improve school ethos while negative comments were that a democratic school could only occur in an ideal world since pupils were thought not to be mature enough to make decisions and planning. Their motivation to provide a 'democratic' education was initiated by the national policy and bounded by the RRSA criteria. Some of them were thinking of following the recommendation by the RRSA inspection report, more parental involvement and considering the possibility of consulting pupils in the school improvement plans and staff appointments.

- What are the facilitating factors and obstacles for mainstream schools seeking more democratic approaches to education?

Partnership with other schools, the local council and supportive national policies were seen as external facilitating factors for schools to be democratic through the motivation from the RRSA. Other than that, pupils, teachers and the SMT were also the important drivers for democracy in schools. The benefits brought by the democratic approaches such as improved behaviour and positive relationships have convinced many

teachers to continue supporting and to help expand democratic practices in their schools. The obstacles for democratic practices in schools were perceived to be time constraints, teacher resistance and pupil disengagement and immaturity. In addition, the researcher has identified the constraints posed by the national policy and the bounded duty of the school as the obstacles for pushing schools to be more democratic.

### **6.3 Summary**

As discovered in the main findings, there are signs and momentum for mainstream schools to become more democratic but there are also obstacles for such process. The RRSA has brought about many positive changes such as positive relationships and improved pupil welfare through upholding and practicing the UNCRC. Pupils and teachers could also bring about changes in their school through the RRSA where the situation allowed, showing a shared responsibility in school management with the SMT. Pupil consultation on school improvement plans and staff appointments is also being considered by the participants. Hence, these are the good signs for rights-respecting schools to become more democratic through improving pupil voice and participation in school management.

Nevertheless, the RRSA has its limitations in making schools more democratic due to the issues of pupil maturity, constraints from the national policy and its inherent language in dichotomising the role of adults and children, as highlighted in the previous chapter. Although the RRSA was not intended to promote a democratic school, it has certainly encouraged schools to be as democratic as possible within adults' judgement and under the constraints of their defined duties. It must not be denied that the RRSA has at least opened teachers' eyes that the children's rights in the UK were yet to be improved.

This research has hence situated itself within the debates of children's rights in schools, the impact of national examinations in schools and the evaluation of school external initiatives, which are the RRSA and the national policy. These debates were centred on the concept of a democratic school such that how these issues could have affected schools' respect for individual pupil's rights and the sharing of school management responsibility were explored.

## 6.4 Limitations

Before moving on to the implications of this research for various educational stakeholders, I would like to state the limitations of this research. As described in the methodology section, this study was a qualitative study and only a small number of schools and participants were involved in order to give an in-depth picture of the RRSA implementation and their views on a democratic school. This study also faced time constraints so it could only involve a limited number of participants and excluded pupils from the interview data. Furthermore, this study could be biased as it involves a number of researchers' interpretations when collecting, analysing and presenting data (Scott & Morrison, 2005). These are true of a qualitative research generally, and affect generalizability while being accepted within this paradigm. Other than that, the range of sampling and recruitment is also limited in number and in quality such that the findings might not represent the views of all teachers and head teachers in Scottish rights-respecting secondary schools. The researcher's cultural background and lack of experience as a teacher and a pupil in the Scottish secondary school could have limited and exaggerated the issues and findings in the schools.

Acknowledging the complexity of an educational system, the coverage of the issues in this research may be one-sided due to limitations in the researcher's knowledge. Hence, this research has potential to over-simplifying issues in the Scottish educational system, including the interaction between politics, economic development and educational policies. However, a cultural outsider's view brings strengths as well, as discussed in Chapter 3. This also implies the dangers of extrapolating these findings from the Scottish context to other nations due to differences in culture, demographics and history that transferring the national policy should be taken with extra caution. Other co-existing issues during the research may be present. For example, the current generation may have certain effect on the perception of a democratic school that the findings cannot hold true for a longer period of time.

Therefore, different educational stakeholders should take the many limitations of this study into consideration when interpreting the implications of this research. Nevertheless, I hope the concepts and issues discussed here will be taken seriously.

## **6.5 Implications**

This study has involved a number of stakeholders due to its background and the target participants of this research. In addressing the concerns and issues raised in this research, this section describes further consideration and action that could be taken by schools, UNICEF and policy makers.

### **6.5.1 For Schools**

This study has taken the concepts of alternative democratic education, which is one possible direction of the future educational system, as guidance for discussion. As discussed in the literature review, some scholars have produced empirical findings that could serve as the evidence that a different degree of democratic participation in school management has introduced many benefits to schools, including improved academic performance and school ethos. Hence, schools are encouraged to reflect on their goals of education and their roles in empowering pupils for their intrinsic rights, recognising pupils as autonomous beings despite their dependency on adults.

As demonstrated by the schools investigated, the introduction of rights through the RRSA did not lead to anarchy since a school charter was established under pupils' and teachers' consensus and was upheld collectively. Other than the RRSA, schools could discover their ways to improve pupil voice and participation via looking at how some responsibilities and powers that are traditionally bounded by adults, including designing teaching content and behavioural management could be questioned by, communicated with and shared with pupils. Instead of solving problems for them and seeking funding for them to resolve their issues, more transparency and information could be offered so that pupils could be guided to improve the school environment, moving the role of pupil councils beyond channelling their complaints on school problems and pupil welfare. In this way, pupils could take ownership of their school and learning, at the same time training their problem-solving skills. Here, I shall reiterate an argument presented by Biesta (2008): democratic practices in school can improve pupils' as well as adults' 'democratic skills and disposition such as negotiation, compromise, awareness of the impact of conflict on the

overall well-being of the community and the environment, and development of well-informed respect for the differences between people' (p.44).

As indicated in the RRSA focus group guidance, teachers should not show favouritism in order to uphold non-discrimination and justice in schools. However, there might be cases for which justice in the school might not be upheld on the occasion that pupils were being bullied or discriminated against since teachers might have overlooked or ignored some misbehaviour (Evans, 2005). Pupils could share teachers' responsibility in such cases where possible. However, teachers and pupils could understand the source of misbehaviour by actively communicating with the bullies to understand if their rights were being upheld at home. This is within the framework of the RRSA and was strongly recommended by Howe & Covell (2010). Acknowledging that this might not be applicable to each case, pupils who are bullies or involved in discriminating others could be seen as a victim due to their background. Such a tendency was already observed in school since disengaged pupils were described by teachers as those coming from a chaotic background and this thinking could be taught and extended to the pupils.

For the schools which are aspiring to become a democratic school, their conception of a democratic school should not be confined to voting for an election and pupils having a voice that being acted upon but actively involving pupils in school management and an associated relationship between adults and children. Other than providing the best experience for the pupils, schools should also reflect on their role in a democratic society and how they could have an impact on the future of a democratic nation since they are in charge of many children's education. As conceptualised by Carr & Harnett (1996), education is a part of social transformation and a long revolution of the nation so that what we can teach our next generation today may have an impact on the political climate of the future. What type of democracy we could have in the future, be it elitist, direct, representative, adversarial or deliberative democracy, is shaping its ground in the schools (Carcasson & Sprain, 2012).

### **6.5.2 For UNICEF**

A few participants have expressed the need to change the Level Two RRSA criteria for secondary schools since embedding the UNCRC in every subject was seen as impossible. This could be resolved through accepting the suggestion or providing ideas for

implementation to the schools. However, teachers' pressure and workload in secondary schools should be recognised since preparing pupils for national examinations is seen as the main task of teachers' duty. Changing the Level Two RRSA criteria could potentially motivate schools to sustain their effort in implementing the RRSA.

In terms of implementing the RRSA, the intention of the RRSA could be communicated with more emphasis on upholding the UNCRC in the UK. Other than concerning the lives of homeless children, schools could be guided to reflect on pupils' freedom and autonomy when implementing the RRSA. In accordance with that, UNICEF should also continue to assert the argument that national examinations are system-centred rather than fulfilment of government's obligation in upholding the UNCRC (Harber, 2004). This is important if individual rights and diversity are to be respected.

The study has also documented the RRSA attempt to require schools not to link rights with responsibility when teaching rights so that children were taught that their entitlement of rights is unconditional upon their actions. It was intended to make sure children's rights were fulfilled by them asserting their unconditional rights entitlement even if they were irresponsible (Howe & Covell, 2010). Indeed some participants have recognised that rights are unconditional upon children's actions such that children need not to be responsible to be entitled to rights. However, the UNCRC was still used as a tool for disciplining pupils since behavioural management is one of the reasons for schools to implement the RRSA. It would be difficult to teach pupils to assert their rights as recommended when their freedom and autonomy are bounded by adults' judgement and the national policy. While I appreciate the beneficial effect of the behavioural management introduced by the RRSA, the intention of not linking rights with responsibility when teaching the UNCRC should be well-communicated. The beneficial effect of this way of teaching, that children who had their rights fulfilled would make sure others' rights were met, as conceptualised by Howe & Covell (2010), should be emphasised as well.

Other than the suggestion on the Level Two RRSA and the communication of intentions, there are some other minor recommendations presented below, focusing on the language of the school charters and the UNCRC. The school charter could move away from the format of school rules and be based on universal moral values such as human dignity, tolerance and respect as suggested by Evans (2005) since they are reported to improve the outcome of behavioural management. Regarding the adults' judgement on the UNCRC entitlement, the language of the UNCRC could also be reconsidered to reconstruct the adults' role in upholding the UNCRC.

### 6.5.3 For Policy Makers

This study has illustrated teachers' and head teachers' views on democratic practices in schools and has problematized national examinations and schools as educational providers in upholding pupils' individual rights and sharing school management responsibility with pupils. In contexts where democratisation is a goal, these findings could have implications for policy makers if these selected few participants' views are taken seriously. Although they are small in number, their experience for being the schools' driving force to improve pupils' learning experience through introducing the RRSA is valuable. Their perceptions of the obstacles and the underlying challenges to their work should be paid attention to so that their momentum for school improvement could be kept or reproduced in other schools. It can be quite legitimate to question the reproducibility of the reported benefits in this research in other contexts but many scholars have also pointed out that democratic education in other countries, including developing countries, has the same effect such as improved school effectiveness and management, together with its contribution in consolidating democracy (Harber, 1997; Harber & Mncube, 2012; Harber & Trafford, 1999; MacBeath & Moos, 2003).

First of all, policy makers should reflect on the hierarchical structure of the schooling system which can be either a hindrance or a facilitator of democratic practices in schools depending on the flexibility and control given to the schools. Indeed the Scottish Government's commitment to the UNCRC, together with the autonomy and direction given to the schools by national educational policy, has facilitated the initiation and the RRSA implementation. These are important features that can be considered as a major strength of the Scottish educational system.

However, as highlighted in the discussion and literature review, the national curriculum and examinations remain major obstacles for pupil empowerment and take away children's individual rights. First of all, the policy language implies that schools are the educational providers while pupils are the passive consumers of education. This is worsened by the changing policy that adds to pupils' and teachers' workload on the preparation for change. I recognise the complexity of the intricate connections between the changing global priorities, politics, economic development and the educational system and hence the importance of the national educational policy to regulate school activities.

However, the debate of the purpose of education should continue, whether it should be aimed for economic development as set up by the EU (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014), respect for human rights as communicated in the UNCRC (UNICEF, 2012) or for individual development as conceptualised by Scottish educational policy (SEED, 2006), and whether it should give equal treatment to each student by privileging certain knowledge or upholding justice and respect diversity of knowledge and pupils (Whitty, 1989). Ultimately, how effectively the school can achieve these purposes should be actively evaluated since schooling occupies most people's childhood experience.

Other than that, this research has observed the schools' interpretation of the RRSA restriction of not linking with responsibility when teaching rights. As discussed, the RRSA message was misinterpreted and misunderstood such that teachers continued to use rights as a tool for pupils' self-discipline. It has demonstrated Pratt & Silverman's (1988) argument that 'policy, quite simply, cannot be translated into practice in the straightforward manner often assumed to be possible, because implementation almost inevitably leads to unexpected or unintended consequences' (as cited in Swann & Brown, 1997, p. 97). It should be recognised that teachers are autonomous delivery agents and that top-down message could be miscommunicated and misinterpreted such that teachers' original intention could be maintained (Schweisfurth, 2000). Such resilience of overcoming top-down restriction should be noted in future instructions in policy making. My further thought on this problem is that the underlying motivation for teachers' actions should be understood clearly before devising a solution to tackle the problem.

Finally, as discussed in the literature review and as pointed out by an informant in a preliminary interview, policy makers such as those in Israel and Denmark have been publicly funding alternative democratic schools (Harber, 1997). Indeed, in a democratic nation, policy makers should support and respect the diversity of educational providers instead of dictating what should be taught in schools based on the fact that they are holding the funding (Arthur & Cremin, 2014). Only with public funding and support for alternative education, can alternative democratic schools be truly democratic for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds who could not have afforded a democratic school tuition fee. However, turning all schools to democratic schools requires a significant amount of effort, not least since as identified by Hope (2012), democratic schools are all small in number, around 100 pupils, but the schools investigated were all more than 500 pupils. In fact, using the Norwegian system as a reference point Wrigley & Lofsnaes (2005) proposed organising small schools was a way forward for Scottish secondary schools.

Other than that, the degree of personalisation of pupils' curriculum as proposed in CfE should be reconsidered. This is because personalisation should not only be about choices of subjects but individual freedom in deciding their learning content. This could potentially replace the equal treatment of education as practiced by the current mainstream schooling system to do justice to the individual pupil's talent and interests, such as what is being practiced in some alternative democratic schools.

## **6.6 Contributions of this Research**

This study took place when the first batch of pupils who were affected by the new CfE policy were sitting for national examinations. Teachers' pressure and workload during this period and its impact on school management and classroom practice were hence captured. Such effects of policy change could inform the upstream of policy implementation for future reference and for considering the necessity of policy change. This study could also serve as a common ground for school stakeholders who are seeking ways to implement the RRSA since the benefits, the obstacles and the solution to challenges posed by the RRSA implementation have been documented in this study.

This research has participated in the debate about rights and the conception of a democratic school. The issues of rights raised in this study include the attempt to correct the 'miseducation of rights' and the problems of the UNCRC language and the dichotomised role of adults and children in schools which act as educational providers. In relation to the language of the UNCRC, adults' judgement of children's maturity as a basis of rights entitlement has been problematized since it has a serious impact on the extent of democracy in school. Furthermore, under the restriction of the national curriculum and examinations, schools' provision of education could be narrowly defined as to pursue academic excellence which would in turn infringe other individual rights (Harber, 2004).

Next, the study has uncovered teachers' and head teachers' attitudes towards a democratic school. By introducing the concept of a 'democratic school' into the discussion, teachers and head teachers revealed why they felt achieving a democratic school was difficult and could only occur in an ideal world. These are important findings since teachers' belief systems influence their teaching practice and their motivation to change the school (Pajares, 1992). Having reflected on how they thought of the current state of pupil

voice and participation in schools, I have pointed out the possible direction of improvement and uncovered the underlying obstacles, which are their perceptions of pupils' maturity and a rigidly structured educational system. These were the areas that few participants had criticised or recognised as the fundamental problems of mainstream schools.

In sum, this research has practical and theoretical implications since it has gathered teachers' and head teachers' perceptions on the RRSA and their conceptualisation of a democratic school. It contributes to a number of academic debates with the conceptual understanding of rights and a democratic school through empirical findings, which could in turn inform future actions of education stakeholders.

## **6.7 Future Research**

This study has explored teachers' and head teachers' views of a democratic school in Scottish rights-respecting secondary schools. Many interesting findings arise from this study as they can elucidate the schools' momentum and obstacles towards becoming a democratic school. Similar studies could be done in England, where the RRSA is implemented under a different policy and cultural context, where citizenship education is a subject to be studied rather than implemented across the curriculum as in Scotland and where schools are under the pressure of school inspections by Ofsted (Cowan & McMurtry, 2009). Hence, the difference between the two contexts can elucidate how these factors could have affected the initiation of the RRSA in schools and the teachers' and head teachers' views of a democratic school.

Due to time constraints and a desire to focus on understanding teachers' and head teachers' views, parents' and pupils' views were not explored in this study. However, they are important stakeholders in Scottish secondary schools from whom teachers and head teachers often seek advice when making decisions. Parents' views on rights are important to understand how much children's assertion of rights is acceptable to parents. Pupils' views are also important since they are the schools' bottom-up change agents and could assert their rights in a rights-respecting school. Furthermore, pupils were found less satisfied with the citizenship education in schools and have different views of pupil participation when compared to teachers (Cross, et al., 2009; Mills, 2004). Therefore, there may be a potential discrepancy between adults' and pupils' views of a democratic school.

Since pupils' power is bounded by the constraints of the national curriculum and adults' power, how they perceive their boundaries and their attempts to transgress the limits in a rights-respecting secondary school are important since they share the responsibility to improve their schools. Moreover, the methods used in this research could be triangulated with ethnographic methods as a way to enrich the interview and document data. A longitudinal study of how the RRSA affected the graduates could be done to understand if they exhibit alternative democratic school graduates' characteristics and whether human rights education has influenced the graduates' careers in the long run.

Further investigation on alternative education is also suggested. As mentioned in the literature review, the preliminary interviews only involved three directors of alternative democratic schools. How the other stakeholders defined a democratic school, their perceptions of the UNCRC and what was perceived as democratic practices are important to illustrate what are important to them. In addition to interviews, ethnographic methods could be used to observe how these beliefs were upheld. The policy makers' voice could also be heard to understand their willingness to support alternative democratic schools and their motivation towards promoting democratic practice in mainstream schools.

In short, future research on different geographical areas, other educational systems and stakeholders using the same or different methods could be done to further understand how different educational stakeholders view democratic practices in schools and how motivated they are in promoting them to give a comprehensive account of the issues. Other issues such as the impact of the RRSA could be studied to understand its long term effect on the rights-respecting school graduates.

## **6.8 Final Words**

With sweat and tears the dissertation has finally come to an end but my passion for alternative democratic schools and research remains. With these final words I wish to reiterate my message throughout the research: children are autonomous and their decisions on how they spend their time on playing and learning should be respected. Each person undergoes a different pathway of life and it is the freedom from an authoritarian figure that allows one to seek their unique way of life, which in turn contributes to diversity of the humankind. It is my hope that one's self-determination and freedom could be respected via upholding individual rights and achieving an equal relationship between children and

adults. As asserted by Young (1990) adamantly, children's '[d]ependency should not be a reason to be deprived of choice and respect' (as quoted in Killen, 2012). In this way, children could learn and grow happily with adults' support.

Throughout the writing I have attempted to be bold in communicating complex ideas and personal beliefs about education. I was once hesitant to do this but I saw it as an important channel for me to exert my view in the academic world. I am indeed grateful for having the opportunity to question and crystallise my independent thoughts in this dissertation. This has indeed been a wonderful journey of research and education, and both formally and informally cultured my analytical and critical thinking.

In sum, this chapter has concluded this dissertation by stating what I have learned from this research and how have the research aims been achieved. A summary of the findings and the limitations of this study were presented with the latter focused on time constraints, potential biases due to subjectivity and over-simplification of educational issues. This research has raised issues of children's rights in schools and how they could be promoted or hindered by external initiatives such as national policies and the RRSA. In the discussion of democratic schools, there is an emphasis on equality between children and adults, in addition to a respect of the UNCRC in schools. In conjunction to these issues, this research has implications for schools, UNICEF and policy makers. For schools, children's intrinsic rights should be respected and some traditionally adult roles and responsibilities could be shared with children with more transparency and information. In this way, pupils could be opened to more opportunities in actively participating in school management. For UNICEF, actions should be taken on the complaints that Level Two RRSA criteria were too difficult to be achieved in secondary schools. They should also stand on the point that national examinations, although a convenience for governance, could infringe the UNCRC. For policy makers, national examinations and hierarchical structures of educational systems should be reevaluated for their effectiveness in promoting democratic practices in schools. At the same time, debates on the purpose of schooling should be continued. This research has contributed more empirical evidence of democratic practices of schools to the practitioners as well as the academic scholars. Notably, it adds to the debates on the policy-making, interpretation of the UNCRC and democratic schools. Research on different political and cultural context, using different methods, on alternative education, with a longer time frame of study and including views from policy makers, parents and pupils are proposed. Finally, the chapter ended with my final words for the research.

## Appendices

### A: Ethical Approval



#### Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects

**Staff Research Ethics Application**   
**Application**

**Postgraduate Student Research Ethics**

#### Application Details

**Application Number:** 2098355p

**Applicant's Name** Yong Shian Phoon

**Project Title** Teachers' and Head Teachers' Views of Democratic Practices in Rights-respecting Secondary Schools

#### Application Status

**Approved**

**Start Date of Approval** (d.m.yr) 15.01.2014

(blank if Changes Required/ Rejected)

**End Date of Approval of Research Project** (d.m.yr) 31.09.2014

**Only if the applicant has been given approval can they proceed with their data collection with effect from the date of approval.**

#### Recommendations (where Changes are Required)

- **Where changes are required all applicants must respond** in the relevant boxes to the recommendations of the Committee and upload this as the **Resubmission Document** online to explain the changes you have made to the application. All resubmitted application documents should then be uploaded.
- **(If application is Rejected a full new application must be submitted via the online system.** Where recommendations are provided, they should be responded to and this document uploaded as part of the new application. A new reference number will be generated.

(Shaded areas will expand as text is added)

**MAJOR RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

**APPLICANT RESPONSE TO MAJOR**

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**MINOR RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE  
RECOMMENDATIONS****APPLICANT RESPONSE TO MINOR**

--	--

**REVIEWER COMMENTS  
COMMENTS****APPLICANT RESPONSE TO REVIEWER**

*(OTHER THAN SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS)*

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*Please retain this notification for future reference. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact Terri Hume, Ethics Administrator.*

*End of Notification.*

## B: Consent Form



### Consent Form

**Title of Project: Teachers' and Head Teachers' Views of Democratic Practices in Rights-respecting Secondary Schools**

**Name of Researcher: Yong Shian Phoon (Heather)**

1. *I confirm that I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.*
2. *I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.*
3. *I give the consent to being interviewed and for the process being audio-taped.*
4. *I am aware that copies of transcript will be returned for verification and I will be referred to by pseudonym in any publications arising from the research,*
5. *I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Name of Participant*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

*Yong Shian Phoon*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
*Researcher*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature*

## C: Plain Language Statement



### Plain Language Statement

#### 1. Study title

*Teachers' and Head Teachers' Views of Democratic Practices in Rights-respecting Secondary Schools*

#### 2. Researcher Details

*My name is Yong Shian Phoon (Heather). I am undertaking a postgraduate Master of Philosophy (MPhil) programme at the University of Glasgow. My address is School of Education, University of Glasgow, St. Andrew's Building, 11 Eldon Street, G3 6NH Glasgow, Scotland, UK. My e-mail is [y.phoon.1@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:y.phoon.1@research.gla.ac.uk).*

#### 3. Invitation paragraph

*You are being invited to take part in this research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.*

#### 4. What is the purpose of the study?

*The study aims to explore teachers' and head teachers' understandings and perceptions of democratic practices in rights-respecting secondary schools. Democratic practices in schools are getting more and more attention from policy makers and scholars as a way to improve current educational practices. The definition of democratic school is still a contested one as it changes according to the speakers' agenda. How head teachers and teachers understand democratic school concepts and how motivated they are in promoting democratic practices in school is not very well known. This research is also to describe the challenges and benefits of school communities in carrying out democratic practices. The findings will inform a number of factors influencing the successful implementation of democratic practices in schools.*

#### 5. Why have I been chosen?

*You have been chosen to take part in the research because you are either a teacher or a head teacher in a rights-respecting secondary school. As a teacher you have been chosen because you are interested in reflecting your educational practices, responsible for teaching modern studies or the teacher-in-charge in pupil council of your school. Your name came up as someone has recommended you to comment on this matter.*

#### 6. Do I have to take part?

*Taking part in the research is entirely voluntary. If you decided to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign an accompanying consent form which ensures your anonymity in the project and that your responses will be confidential. You can also stop participating at any time you wish without giving any reason.*

### **7. What will happen to me if I take part?**

*You will be requested to complete an interview. The interview consists of questions asking about your understandings and perceptions of democratic practices in your school in general. The interview will be audio-taped and will last for an hour.*

### **8. Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

*The study aims to keep all participation and response data confidential. Steps to be taken to ensure confidentiality include the removal of any identifying information such as personal details from the participants' interview data and keep the two documents separate. During the study, we will limit access to these de-identified responses ONLY to the researcher (myself) and my research supervisors. All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and no identifying information will be published.*

### **9. What will happen to the results of the research study?**

*The responses you provide will contribute to gaining information on how communities in rights-respecting schools perceive democratic practices and how democratic practices in schools can be promoted. The results together with the document analysis will form the core of my MPhil dissertation. It is possible that the data gathered could also form part of journal articles and conference papers but you will not be identified in any future publication. If you wish to obtain a copy of any publication, please feel free to e-mail me.*

### **10. Who is organising and funding the research?**

*The research is part of the general fulfilment for the award of a postgraduate degree at the University of Glasgow. The research is self-funded.*

### **11. Are there any disadvantages in taking part in this study?**

*No disadvantages have been identified.*

### **12. What are the possible risks of taking part?**

*No risks have been identified.*

### **13. What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

*It is hoped that the study will help you to reflect your educational practices.*

### **14. Who has reviewed the study?**

*The University of Glasgow, College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.*

### **15. Contact for Further Information**

*Please feel free to contact the university's ethics officer and my supervisor should you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research. The details are as below:*

Primary Research Supervisor:

Prof. Michele Schweisfurth

Address: School of Education, University of Glasgow, St. Andrew's Building, 11 Eldon Street, G3 6NH Glasgow, Scotland, UK.

Tel: +44 141 330 4445

E-mail: [Michele.Schweisfurth@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Michele.Schweisfurth@glasgow.ac.uk)

Secondary Research Supervisor:

Dr. Alan Britton

Address: School of Education, University of Glasgow, St. Andrew's Building, 11 Eldon Street, G3 6NH Glasgow, Scotland, UK.

Tel: +44 141 330 3498

E-mail: [Alan.Britton@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Alan.Britton@glasgow.ac.uk)

College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer:

Dr. Valentina Bold

E-mail: [Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk)

**Thank you for reading this.**

## D: Interview Schedule

### [Interview questions]

Which year group are you teaching? Which subject are you teaching?

How long have you been teaching/a head teacher for?

Your school is a rights-respecting school,

- Do you like the implementation of UNCRC being introduced to your school? Does it have high priority?
- What triggers it? What has been changed as a result of RRSA? Were you expecting such changes? Have they changed your attitude about children's rights in schools?
- Would you recommend it in other schools? Why? What are the facilitating factors? What are the challenges embedding UNCRC in your school (cost, time, resistance, curriculum constraint, trouble, misinterpretation)? Did the pupil abuse their rights?
- What do you think the benefits are? Are there any controversial children rights article?
- Have government policies been supportive? What can be done differently?

Tell me about pupil participation in your school.

- How did they start?
- What are the teachers' roles in the activities?
- Does pupil participation in your school have high priority?
- Do pupils participate in teaching, learning and school management? (Pupil council?)
- Would you improve pupil participation and children's rights in your school? How? Why? What are the benefits? What challenges will you face? How would you solve them?

What do you think we mean when we talk about 'democratic school'? What do you think a democratic school might look like?

- How far you think your school is democratic? What about in classroom? What about the relationship between teacher and head teacher?
- Do you think schools should be democratic?

What do you think education is for? /What is the main purpose of education? What made you want to become an educator? What do you hope your school can be like?

## E: List of Participants

No	Date	Participant	Job title	School	Duration	Word Count
1	23/04/2014	Katharine	Principal Teacher	H	44:36	7,877
2	07/05/2014	Liz	Support Teacher	H	44:33	6,616
3	07/05/2014	Adele	Teacher	H	34:38	5,330
4	07/05/2014	Christine and Emily	Teacher and Probationary Teacher	H	51:28	8,632
5	07/05/2014	Christopher	Head Teacher	H	17:20	2,366
6	09/05/2014	Felicia	Teacher	W	27:15	4,749
7	09/05/2014	Andrea	Head Teacher	W	21:44	2,891
8	13/05/2014	Penelope	Teacher	B	35:23	6,117
9	13/05/2014	Grace	Teacher	B	57:56	9,166
10	13/05/2014	Lorna	Depute Head Teacher	B	43:31	6,061
11	27/05/2014	Annabelle	Teacher	C	53:34	7,983
12	27/05/2014	Eleanor	Teacher	C	49:07	8,466
13	27/05/2014	Sean	Depute Head Teacher	C	36:00	5,204
14	27/05/2014	Alicia	Depute Head Teacher	C	33:28	5,275
15	27/05/2014	James	Head Teacher	C	53:48	10,251

## **F: Documents Collected from Schools**

School B: HMIe and RRSA inspection report, school Standards and Quality report, school handbook 2014/2015, school vision and values poster, school charter, RRSA action plan, teaching materials, homework sample, presentation slides in classroom, assemblies, CPD and inspection, inspection planning sheet, pupil and staff feedback on school charter, staff evaluation results, quizzes for pupils, Fairtrade invoices, Letter of support for Education Convener Award, e-mail correspondents and school newsletter.

School C: RRSA inspection report, school vision & value jigsaw logo, school charter, school handbook 2013, RRSA action plan, RRS newsletter, RRSA poster for public, RRSA pupil questionnaire, RRSA steering group meeting minutes, student council meeting minutes, teaching materials and presentation slides.

School H: HMIe report, school vision and values poster, school charter, RRSA action plan, RRSA steering group meeting minutes, RRSA impact evaluation, RRSA self-evaluation form, RRSA pupil survey results, teaching materials, e-mail correspondents, school behavioural policy, school improvement priorities, school newsletter.

School W: HMIe report, school Standards and Quality Report session 2012-2013, school handbook 2014/2015, school charter, school improvement plan, pupil council meeting minutes, school newsletter.

## G: Extract from a Sample Interview

The example below is an extract from an interview with Alicia from school C. The highlighted regions are the coded regions. Full transcripts are available upon request.

[...]

H: So do you like it being implemented in this school, the RRSA?

A: Yes absolutely yes. It's a fabulous agenda and I mean as for now I said I have been teaching for 25 years and it's one of the most exciting initiatives I have been involved in and all that time I think it's something that could really make a difference to our school. I think it has completely changed the ethos of the school.

H: Ok, can you describe more about the ethos?

A: Well I just think student absolutely know what their rights are now, and they know what their rights of others are, and I think there is that kind of I have seen the return of old fashion manners, opening the door, saying thank you, saying please, you know those are very small things but I think they make a big difference, aha, I think umm that lots and lots of our students know that even if they are different, they are accepted in our school. I think that's a great thing!

H: That's a big benefit brought by RRSA. Are there any benefits you would like to mention?

A: Well I think umm, the fact that umm in the steering group, some of the students were picked from all over the school, and we had umm one student from the deaf education and one student from the inclusion umm from the ASN department, so there was a few group of students have a good mix but there... everybody was feeling included so even my umm the boy from ASN department, he has very very very bad dyslexia was included and making a presentation to everyone so he was allowed to learn how to wee bit, speak it out, and he has become extremely confident umm but all of the youngsters who have been involved in rights-respecting especially the steering group students are fantastic young role models for everyone else in the school now, you know they are really understand what's behind rights-respecting and why we introduced it, they come up with their own charter I mean they own that charter. They made and designed leaflets for the parents and help with all the displays down in the school. Umm so it's just... just the examples all the time. For example, umm we will say to kids now, 'you're going detention', and they will say to us, 'are you allowed to give me detention? We have the right to have my lunch!' And we will say, well yes, but you are also, you know, all the other children have the right to get on with their lesson, and you have been disruptive so you are taking away their rights, so here's... you know, this is about taking responsibility, umm but it's good that there's a dialogue about what's going on so it's really good, haha, it's really good!

H: So looks like you enjoy this dialogue a lot.

A: I do. I do.

H: Makes you more human, isn't it?

A: Yea, absolutely.

H: Aha. Just now you said that the [name], triggered this happening, or...?

A: I think [name], she was involved umm maybe two years earlier umm and then umm... her and [name] and [name], you know, trickled them down move them anywhere and then we got back on board and decided ok right, what we are going to do with this. And we got the kids together, and suddenly just all [rushing sound] and I think we are one of the first [LA2] school to get a umm first level and lots of other schools come here to ask us about it now, because I think we have got some good practice in the school.

H: Looks like you are very proud of it.

A: Yea, that's great piece of work!

H: Looks like there have been lots of changes because of RRSA?

A: And you can't always say it's just that thing that change it, but it certainly part of, you know, the move forward in a way positive, umm fully inclusive ethos.

H: Ok. So what are the other factors?

A: Well I think just the fact that the we were all separate schools, and we have come together and now we are seven years on, the children who used to be in old schools, are no longer here, they have grown out of the top end of the school now, they have all come through so everyone who comes in now is [school C] people, we are not [name], [name], [name] we are just all [school C] now, and I think that helps too.

H: Ok, so they have become extinct, haha. Ok.

A: Yes.

H: Well, ok. So there are some changes, not really changes, but umm like the charter brought about the ethos changes, were you expecting such change when you first get to know RRSA?

A: Well, I think the thing is umm you are hoping school to effect change but unless the teachers in every class start referring to the charter, you know, to say well here, remember what it says in our charter, and when students are perhaps getting into trouble, they will come up here with deputed referred to the charter and you know, we can explain to their parents when their kids are being excluded from school, and they are coming back to [school C] you know that's part of the charter when you need to show respect to ourselves and for others within the school, you know umm, so but I think that's it happened, you know and we hope for it to happen but you can't always, can't make it happen, so I think that means that uhh all staff felt that it was... it was a good charter. You know, it can be good for the school, so really only because they chose to participate did it effect some change.

H: Was it a particular challenge for you to include staff and pupils in?

A: Umm no not really, but as I say introducing it to the staff umm was not difficult to manage, but it's the getting it introduced so obviously we use the posters in every single class and that was a big cost obviously to the school, but it was a cost worth, you know, spending, umm so it was there and for everybody for every teacher and every child in the class.

H: So would you recommend this to other school?

A: Absolutely.

H: It seems that it has high priority in this school as well?

A: Yes.

H: Ok. Mhmm. Just to shift the topic a bit, about the government policy, do you think they have been supportive?

A: Who?

H: Government policies?

A: To rights-respecting, yes certainly. [LA2] it's the ambassador of all schools to look at rights-respecting now. Yes.

H: Ok. Are you expecting them to do something different?

A: Not sure. Not sure. Umm I think umm they'll ask all schools maybe get Level One and after that they will leave it to schools that the ones who's interested will take on, umm don't know if they will others to do likewise because it's great that you will have an impact change in your own school but really about the bigger impact happens when it goes out into your community. You know, these children then are becoming better people, and umm not just when they are in school, when they go home when they go to jobs when they go to college when they go to work, you know and it can ask filters out there so, that's the bigger picture that I am hoping, you know.

H: Ok, ok. And just now you mention some challenges, do you think there are some other challenge for this RRSA to be implemented in this school?

A: Well no because I think we leave it very open to allow schools to go on a way that they want to go, you know there's always criteria there but you can march into your own school's needs and in your own community's needs. Umm but I think that challenges are you know, if you are really going to make it a priority in your school then you have to give that time to do work. Sometimes that's the problem.

H: Especially when you are very busy.

A: Extremely. [H laughs] Students are very busy.

H: Ok. So since RRSA's so successful in this school, do you there are some facilitating factors in this school that playing a role in this?

A: I think we have got a very proactive management team, who are open to umm what the children wanted for us as a school. And we had some very enthusiastic staff who are particular, you know Angela and Liz and Jillian, were very very enthusiastic. And they believed in it. Umm and I think that it had a lot to do when we move forward. Some of our students who are on the steering group were amazing.

H: Ok. Mhm, can you talk more about their work?

A: Mmm, well just the... I think they got the... that was they have the ownership of it. And there was several very strong members of staff as this part of steering group. And we facilitated the workshop that allows the pupils to put together for us and the charter and the design, you know that the logo that it was all students' work and for example, I didn't give exactly what I wanted, but that wasn't important, it was about what the kids wanted from the school. Umm and some of the students who were on that have been in a primary school where they have done rights-respecting, so they are already came with the base knowledge which really helps us to introduce and discuss this work umm within our group.

H: I see. Can you talk a bit about the pupil council?

A: Sure, our student council, umm we have one student from each house and each year group, from first to sixth year, who umm represent their class, umm and we come together now and we meet once every four to six weeks depending on when the school holidays fit in during this session, umm and during this session, umm, we decided that we would try to have the council run more by students and less by myself because in the past I put the minutes together and I put the agenda together and we took items from the kids out of the student voice box umm, but mainly it was really driven by myself, right, that things that people mention to me now I put it on for discussion, but now, umm the students are in charge of all that, so I didn't even go to the last two meetings, umm where we just facilitated we got the slips out, kids got the permission to come out of class and they showed up and one of our sixth year students have taken the lead and he's really been chairing the meetings and putting agendas together and one of his kids the classmates, another sixth year students have been responsible for taking the minutes, so I then they give me the minutes and I get them printed it out and distribute them but umm it's pretty much become umm ran by the students, and we were sure that's going to be successful, I think in the past we are trying to do it and it didn't work so well but I think because some of the students who are coming up to senior fifth and sixth year level now, umm they have done the leadership courses in our school, which is about taking responsibility and run projects and you know having roles, umm and so our... I think these kids with these leads... the skills of leading a group now umm, are able to run the student council with a little bit of support from our member of staff. So I am very hands off now, and I think that's the way it should be because it's really about the students.

H: Ok I hope it can alleviate your workload a bit.

A: Well, that would be nice too [laugh], that would be nice [laugh].

H: Ok, just want to ask about the leadership programme, who provided it?

A: Umm it's kind of starts as a third year leadership programme and then there's a fourth year leadership programme and it's run by umm other deputed and their department umm, where there's a quite a bit of investment in money by the head teacher and we take pupils out of school and we get them outside providers to come in and give them the training umm and then the kids give them a bit of a project to run, umm and we are starting to see the benefits of those skills coming through from our students now.

H: Ok, are there specific group of students or just them all...

A: Umm the students can apply, there are so many places, and then they will be interviewed, and there is so much so many of them get successful in places on the programme.

H: So they are all in pupil council now?

A: Everyone is invited to apply.

H: Ok. so these pupils that have attended that has all become in pupil council?

A: No no no... some of them are... have done the leadership. Ok so there are the people who can then step up and take up an additional role in running the council.

H: And just now you mention that something that doesn't work because I think it's in pupil council that you are trying to let that go but it didn't work?

A: Previously what we are trying to do was to get one of the students to do the chair, one of the students to do the minutes and one of the students to go and see do the action points, but students umm, because they are busy, fifth and sixth years with their studies umm it just didn't work and you and I ended up doing all myself again. Umm and also involving me getting lots of them out of class more to do the work, whereas this year the students have been doing it in their study time, I mean the private study time, not in class which is much better.

H: Ok, seems there are changes and hopefully it will work this time! Ok, so I want to shift the topic a bit, about democratic school, have you heard about the phrase before?

A: Nope.

H: Ok what does it mean to you, you think, democratic school?

A: I would imagine that's everyone has a say in how the school runs?

H: Mhmm, so do you think school should be democratic?

A: Absolutely, I think it's important that umm people are listened to. I don't think you will always agree to do things, for example one of the things that student council have talked about lots over the years, is on our charity days, umm we, they want to be able to dress up say uhh, it's a pink day, right and they come to school dressed in pink, top to bottom, right? But we as the senior management team have said no, because school uniform is a policy we have in school about safety and about keeping kids safe and identify somebody's who's not in the school straight away because they wouldn't be wearing the school uniform, so to

say on a charity day, but that's no longer important and we don't care about their being safe anymore isn't really the right message so what we do is ask the children to wear their school uniform, short and tie, and then pink stuff all over the top so we can still see the short and tie, so we are still acknowledging we want the people to identify the pupils and keep them safe but support them in a way that they want in the charity day. So that's about what the children have a say but we obviously have some responsibility of managing the school to.

H: Ok, I think I heard some messages do you want to...

A: Oh no no no... this is your time, [laugh].

H: Alright, ok, mmmm. So do you think schools, your school is democratic?

A: I think it's probably more democratic than lots of other schools, I haven't worked in lots of other schools so I don't know but I think that things changed because our pupils umm asked a few years ago, we were in re-organising the school day to 32 period week, from a 30 period week, and umm SMT had kind of an idea of what we thought is going to introduce, the head teacher consulted with parents, but then we consulted with the student council because of some of the things that student council said and talked about changes from there, so you know that kind of made me think well the head teacher and the management team are willing to listen to our students per se and do our best and accommodate the ideas.

H: Yea, it seems that you are very accommodating to, like from the school uniform...

A: It's not always possible, but we are trying, we are trying.

H: Aha, are there any other instances that you think you are trying to have their voices acted?

A: Umm well there were things like umm some of the seniors were saying that many of our school trips that happen in the school umm we are always first and second year because after that we didn't want to take the focus away from our studying, the kids studying, but umm last year we run a trip to Japan for fifth and sixth years only and that was the direct umm we will deliberately organise a trip umm that was for seniors students only, because they have told us we want to have more than just study. You know, we want to be able to go to trips and to go to the theatre and so that you know, so we have that.

H: Do you think the trips are very important?

A: Yes I think they are. They are part of umm that whole ethos. I think back to my own school days, and I think the times that we went away with friends and staff from the school because you get to know people in a very different way, you know in a way skiing or you know climbing up a mountain or visiting a new country, umm yea I think that's all part of our whole school life, the same as I think organising charity we would say, in sports days and all of those things are all part of school ethos.

H: I remember one of my high school days that the next day is actually the exam date but my teachers have decided to take us out for an excursion and then every teacher thought that was crazy but she insisted so that was a good memory.

A: There you go.

H: That we did something different and yea...

A: Sometimes people need to relax too, you know you get very very intense around the exam time. So but I think for some students, they need to focus and for others it's better so you have to have a you know, be flexible and let the students to do what's right for them, I think.

H: Mhmm, ok. You mean there are many different kinds of pupils that...

A: And some need to take a break and others they need to stay focus, and people do do their study differently from each other. That's ok.

H: Mhmm, ok. What about democratic classroom, umm do you think there are democratic practices in classroom?

A: I know certainly that the end of teaching logs, the staff ask them about evaluations from the students, you know, what do you think about this topic, what was good about it, what wasn't good about it, what would you recommend for the next time and did you like the teaching methodologies you know umm so and I think that they are then analysed and things are changed and because of the feedback, for example I get from students. And I know down in the ASN department we have an assembly every single week and every point... at one point at the assembly every week, we would say if there is anything anyone else wants to raise so that's students' or umm the staff, and we can all suggest things. We have a reward system that we run down in stairs for the ASN students, and the students get to pick where they want to go for the reward by the end of the months, so that is pretty democratic. It's not always the places that the teachers want to go with the crazy kids' stuff sometimes, that's good that you know it's their reward so they get to choose, yea.

H: Ok. That's good to hear. And, other than letting the pupil council run by themselves, do you have any ideas how to improve the pupil voice or pupil participation?

A: Well I think the pupil voice box it was introduced as part of the rights-respecting school umm as a new tool and we were getting quite a lot of suggestions from that, umm and uhh that's... it's well used. You know, that the students not always want to bring it through the student council and know who's there, you know, the anonymous element of this student voice box seems to work quite well.

H: Ok. Can you give some example of these suggestions that's been raised?

A: Sure. Thinks like umm they want the labels on the food in the cafeteria, they want the tables left out longer in the cafeteria, they want more bins outside, it's the certain bits, the busy bits of the yard, umm we wanted umm, safe path on the side of the school that the children go across the car park, umm they ask for umm Christmas parties, that kind of thing, there are outings, umm there's also quite personal things like they want to complain

about umm another teacher, who's not following the charter, you know maybe drinking coffee in class or using a mobile phone in class, so we can say oh that's not rights, we can go and have a quiet word. Kids have noticed that you are breaking the rules, pleased that they do that. You know, so that's cool.

H: Do you face any teacher's resistance because of that?

A: No. No, everybody goes, oh ok, fair enough. [Both laugh] Fair enough.

H: Now you are really assuring the quality of the teacher through the suggestion box. Wow.

A: Yea, right. Very much, yea. But if you consider we have got a hundred staff in the school, you know there are so few things like that, you know the staff are on board pretty much, that's good.

H: Ok. that's good. What about the issues raised by brought by the pupil council, are they similar to each other?

A: No not always. Umm but often they are as we are getting new students in the following year, they notice the same kind of things, like umm litter, you know, or umm blazer issue we introduced in the last two years, umm the house captains have a wee trim around their blazers now so that the students can tell umm the student council designed their own uniform when they came to the school, and chose the colour, and designed the tie, they designed the... they decided the school's name when the school was opened now we have the school coming together umm so there's lots and lots of different items that come up through the student council but some of them are repetitive, umm but we don't say oh we discussed that before, we are not going to try anymore so we will have another wee try and remind the student to put litter in the bin umm that kind of thing umm, remind them about no chewing gum, umm but umm no that's kind of it just... it's just the smooth running of the school, you know things that umm students made recommendations that they are trying to introduce them for them.

H: Are there any changes because of that?

A: Well aha, lots of the things that I have told you about already, the blazer, the lunch table staying longer, umm the more bins were purchased for the school, umm safety mats as you come in the door to stop you from slipping when it was a wet day, kind of that, lots and lots of things over the years that have been changed due to the student council. We have obviously implemented the changes to the school day, umm we are going to make the lunch time shorter, umm so that the school day would finish quicker but students say no they want it longer to allow them to go down to the town, so they didn't have to eat in the premises, because lots of students like to do that, meet up with their friends outside, take walk outside the school to get some fresh air. Umm so we changed that.

H: Ok. That's good. Do they participate in school management?

A: No. But umm we have had a number of our students go along to the parent council meetings and senior management team meetings to discuss and certainly the rights-respecting school steering group are called in a [unclear] tracked family because we go on

tour we have now presenting our rights-respecting school umm roadshow to lots and lots of different places in the children have become very confident speakers, umm because they are so used to doing it now and they present it to hundreds of quite important staff, you know head teacher meetings and stuff like that umm for the council which would be quite daunting for any member of staff to stand up and do, the students have done a fantastic job. That's really good.

H: Wow. That's good to hear that students are participating this! Ok. I think it's almost come to the end to our interview, just a couple of questions more. Umm I think this is quite a tricky question but I think you can answer it well. What do you think the main purpose of education is?

A: All about learning, but not just all learning about academics, I think learning is about becoming a good person, a good human being. And learning is all about gathering skills you are going to need to be able to do that to contribute.

H: Mhm, what makes you want to become an educator?

A: Just when I was in primary seven in school and in primary school I wanted to be a teacher.

H: Aha, wow.

A: Not sure, I love working with young people, ummm and I love working in a school community, umm and I found my expertise in working with additional support needs umm and then support those young people and their families, but then, umm to include them as part of the mainstream school was a real challenge, umm very very difficult at the time, but now, seven years down the line working here in [C School], very very proud of it.

H: Ok, that's good. Are there any other important things that you want to tell me?

A: No I think you have covered a lot of things.

H: Really? Really? I thought something is missing but ok, that's good then. If you don't have any other comments, and I should stop. Right, thank you very much for your participation and I have learnt lots from you!

A: You are very much welcome.

## H: Sample letter to the Local Council



[Local Council 1]  
[Address]

4<sup>th</sup> April 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

### Permission to Conduct an MPhil Research into Democratic Practices in Schools

I am writing to seek for your permission to conduct an MPhil Research into democratic practices in Rights-respecting Secondary Schools within [Local Council 1]. This research aims to investigate how teachers and head teachers understand and perceive democratic practices in schools, specifically children's rights and pupil participation.

2. The period for data gathering is from 15<sup>th</sup> January to 31<sup>th</sup> September 2014. The research will involve document collection from 5 schools of different local authorities and interview of 25 teachers and 5 head teachers. Documents such as improvement plans, school charter and pupil council meeting minutes will be collected. The details of interview can be found in the attached information sheet.

3. I would be grateful if you could grant the permission to conduct the study above by returning the e-mail. Should you have any further questions or information please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisors Prof Michele Schweisfurth at [Michele.Schweisfurth@gla.ac.uk](mailto:Michele.Schweisfurth@gla.ac.uk) and Mr Alan Britton at [Alan.Britton@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Alan.Britton@glasgow.ac.uk) .

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Yong Shian PHOON (Heather)  
[Address and e-mail contact]

## I: Sample letter to a School



The Head Teacher  
[School name and address]

26<sup>th</sup> March 2014

Dear Mr [Last name],

### Permission to Conduct an MPhil Research in Your School

I am writing to seek for your permission to conduct an MPhil Research in your school. The project title is 'Teachers' and Head Teachers' Views of Democratic Practices in Rights-Respecting Schools'. This research aims to investigate how teachers and head teachers understand and perceive democratic practices in Rights-Respecting Schools. The research will involve document collection from 5 schools and interview of 25 teachers and 5 head teachers.

2. Head teachers and teachers who are interested in reflecting their teaching practices are invited to participate in this study voluntarily. All participants will be provided with an information sheet which assures the participants of their anonymity, confidentiality and rights to withdraw from this study anytime without giving any reason. They will be requested to sign a consent form prior to the interview to give consent to be audio-recorded in the interview and to have their input included in my dissertation or other publication. The interview is expected to last for an hour.

3. The period for data gathering is from 15<sup>th</sup> January to 15<sup>th</sup> September 2014. The data collected is expected to give information on the challenges and benefits of implementing democratic practices in schools. A short summary of this study will be made available to the participants by the end of the research. It is also hoped that through the interviews, teachers and head teachers will have a chance to reflect on their democratic practices in schools.

4. I would be grateful if you could grant the permission to conduct the study above. Should you have any further questions or need more information please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisors Prof Michele Schweisfurth at [Michele.Schweisfurth@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Michele.Schweisfurth@glasgow.ac.uk) and Mr Alan Britton at [Alan.Britton@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:Alan.Britton@glasgow.ac.uk).

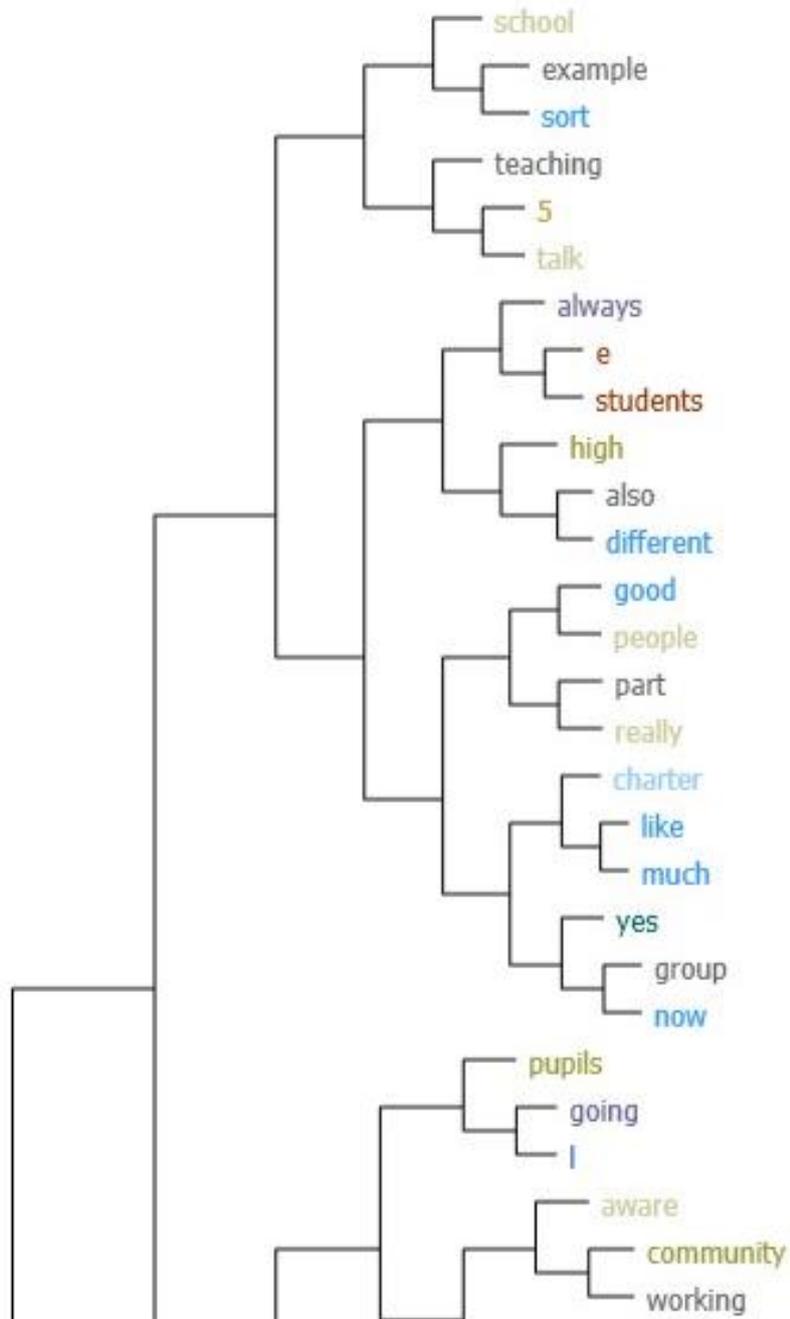
Thank you.

Sincerely,

Yong Shian PHOON (Heather)  
[Address and e-mail contact]

### J: Sample Tree Map Generated by NVivo

#### Word Frequency Query



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