

The Right to Education

What do children
and young people
in Northern Ireland
think about what they
learn at school?



What is the 'Right to Education'?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) lists the rights that all children should have - it is like a set of promises made by governments to children. Each promise is called an 'article'. Two of these articles are about the right to education.

Article 28

You have the right to access education – the right to go to school.

Article 29

Education should be about developing your talents to the full. It should encourage you to respect other people, respect your own and other cultures and to live peacefully. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (a group of experts who check that governments are keeping the promises they have made to children) say that this means that education should:

- Be child-centred, child-friendly and empowering.
- Develop the child's self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Teach children about human rights.
- Encourage tolerance.



- Teach children life skills such as being able to:
 - Make well-balanced decisions.
 - Think critically.
 - Be creative.
 - Sort out disagreements peacefully.
 - Develop a healthy lifestyle.
 - Have good social relationships.

How did we find out?

In 2014, NICCY put together a set of questions with an organisation called ARK. Every year ARK run surveys to get children and young people's views on a wide range of topics. So the questions from NICCY went in to these surveys:

- Kids' Life and Times (KLT) survey which gets the views of P7 children (10/11 years old).
- Young Life and Times (YLT) survey which gets the views of 16 year olds.

You can read the adult report on our website www.niccy.org/ark.

What did we want to know?

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) wanted to find out what children and young people thought about their school experience – and if they were experiencing the type of education that the UNCRC said they had a right to.

Who did we find out from?

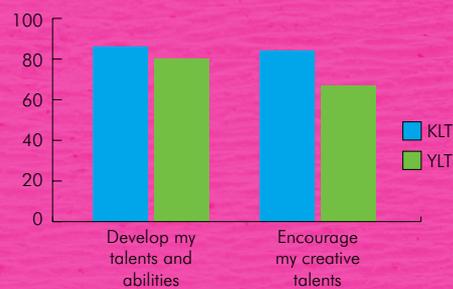
- **4,805 children**
(51% girls; 49% boys)
answered NICCY's questions in KLT.
- **905 young people**
(57% girls; 43% boys)
answered NICCY's questions in YLT.

What did we find out?

Are schools helping to develop children and young people's talents and abilities?

Most of the children and young people who answered this question were positive about this.

Figure 1: Percentage of children and young people who agreed/strongly agreed that the things they learn in school help them to:

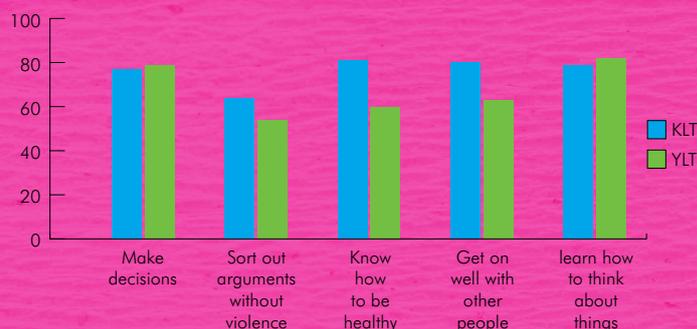


As you can see above in Figure 1, the young people (16 year olds) were not as positive when it came to how school helped them to develop their creative talents. Creativity is important in the curriculum in primary school and in the first three years of secondary schools – so maybe more needs to be done to make sure that creativity is encouraged for older students too.

Are schools helping to develop children and young people's life skills?

Again, most children and young people were positive about this.

Figure 2: Percentage of children and young people who agreed/strongly agreed that the things they learn in school help them to:

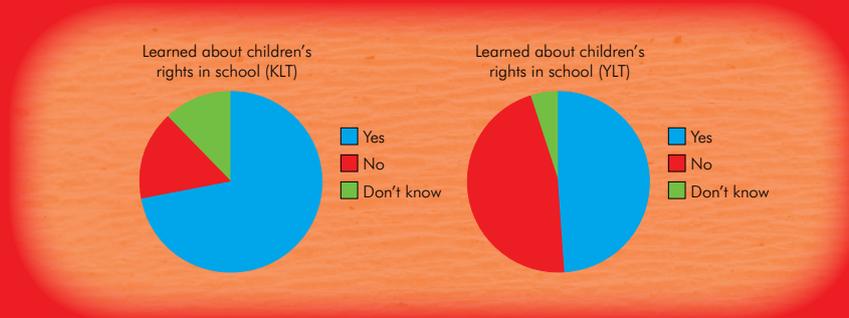


As you can see, children and young people were not as positive about how school helped them sort out arguments without violence. This is meant to be covered in the curriculum so maybe more needs to be done to help young people with this skill. Young people (the 16 year olds) were also a lot less positive than the 11 year old children about how school helped them to know how to be healthy and to get on with other people. Again – this should be covered in the curriculum but maybe it needs to be made more relevant for older students.

Are schools helping to develop respect for human rights?

Most children and just under half the young people said they had learned about children’s rights in school (see Figure 3). But very few children said they had heard of the UNCRC (28% in KLT and 49% in YLT)!

Figure 3: Had children and young people learned about the UNCRC in school?



Also very few children and young people said they knew about the Children’s Commissioner (KLT 12% and YLT 16%).

Learning about the UNCRC is the right of every child. So there needs to be a clearer focus in the curriculum on teaching about UNCRC and the institutions that promote and protect children’s rights.

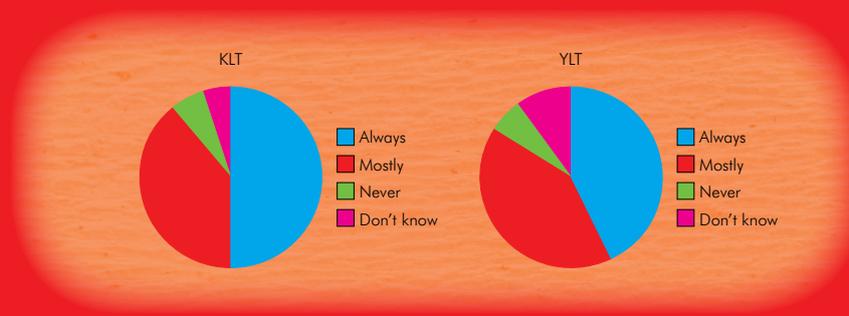
Are schools helping to develop children and young people’s tolerance for others?

Most children and young people thought their school encouraged them to be respectful and tolerant. 89% of children (KLT) and 91% of young people (YLT) either strongly agreed or agreed that school encouraged them to respect each other. 84% of children (KLT) and 82% of young people (YLT) either strongly agreed or agreed that school encouraged them to understand and accept people from different cultures. Two thirds of the children and young people in both survey felt that religious education in school had helped them to understand other world religions.

Are schools developing respect for equality?

As you can see from Figure 4, more children (KLT, 50%) than young people (YLT, 43%) thought that boys and girls were always treated equally in their school.

Figure 4: Are boys and girls treated the same in school?



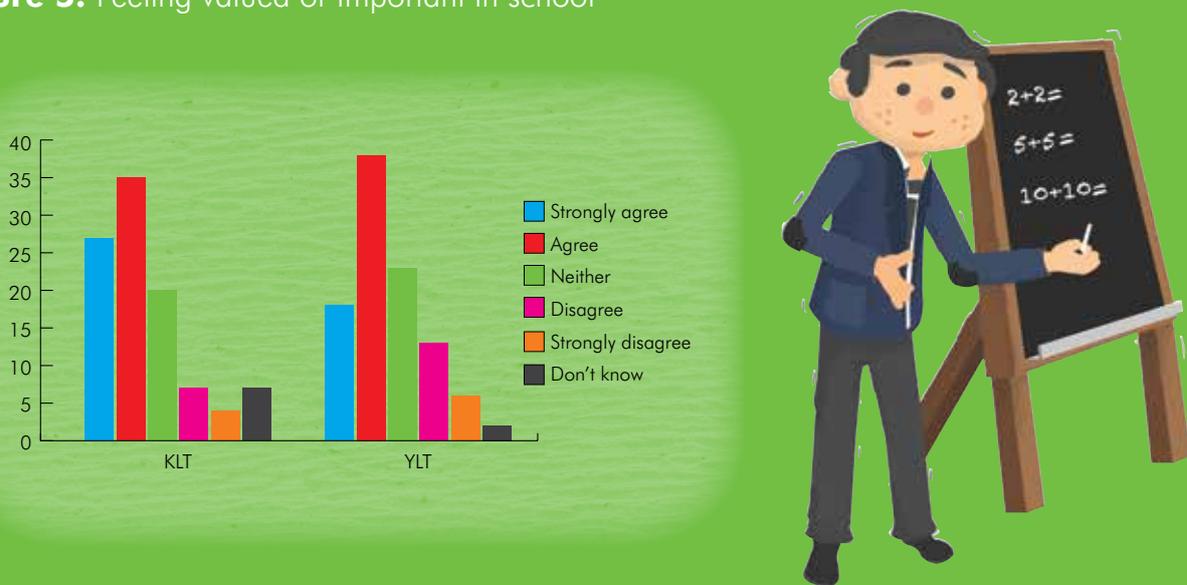
When we looked at how boys and girls answered this question we found out that older boys and younger boys mostly felt the same about it (just under half felt boys and girls were treated the same). But when we looked at older and younger girls we found a difference. Only 39% of the older girls felt that boys and girls were treated the same compared to 53% of younger girls.

This suggests that as children get older they feel that boys and girls aren’t treated the same in school – and that girls are more likely to feel like this as they get older.

Do children and young people feel valued in school?

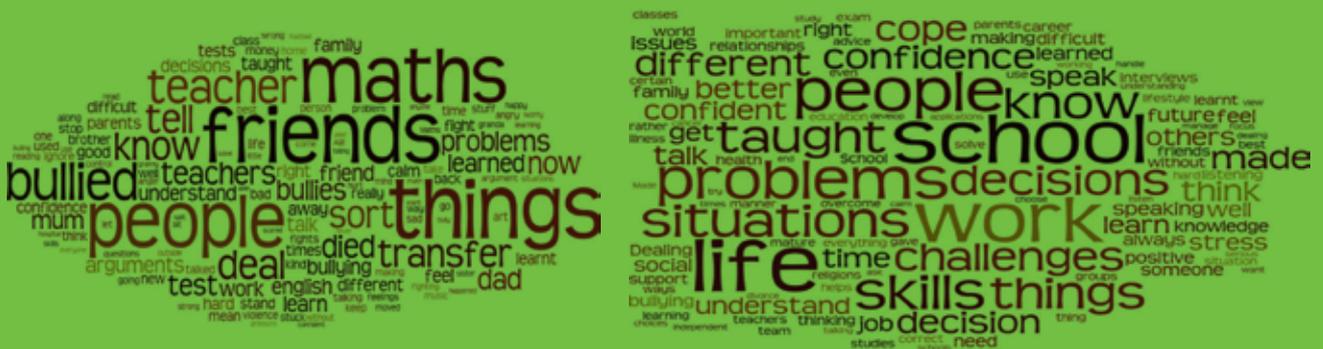
Most children and young people felt valued or important in school (63% strongly agree/agree in KLT; 56% in YLT). However, as you can see from Figure 5, quite a lot of children and young people did not feel valued or important in school. A fifth of children (KLT) and just under a quarter of young people in (YLT) neither agreed or disagreed that they felt important or valued, and just over a tenth of children (KLT) and almost a fifth of young people (YLT) said they did not feel valued.

Figure 5: Feeling valued or important in school



Are schools helping children and young people feel empowered?

Children and young people were asked about whether what they learned had helped them to deal with difficult or challenging things. Around one third of children and young people said what they had studied in school had helped them - the word clouds below show what they told us they had been helped with.



We also found out that young people (YLT) who felt that their family was not well off financially, felt less valued in their school when we compared their answers to the young people who felt their families were either average or well off.

Much more needs to be done in schools to ensure that all young people feel valued and important.

Figure 6: Has learning about rights helped you speak up about your rights?



Children and young people were also asked if learning about rights had helped them to 'speak up' about their rights at school. As Figure 6 shows, 59% of children (KLT) but only 41% of young people (YLT) said 'yes' to this.

Maybe if children and young people knew more about the UNCRC they would feel more confident about speaking up for their rights.

Conclusion - so what does this all mean?

Most of the children and young people who answered the surveys are positive about how their school helps them to:

- Develop their talents and abilities.
- Make well-balanced decisions.
- Develop a healthy lifestyle.
- Resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner.
- Respect each other, and cultures different to their own.

So most children and young people are enjoying their right to the sort of education described in Article 29 of the UNCRC.

But this is a right that **every** child and young person is entitled to, so much more needs to be done to make sure that all children in **every** school have this type of education.

This research shows that more needs to be done to help all children and young people to:

- Develop critical thinking skills, decision making skills and skills for dealing with conflict non-violently.
- Learn more about their UNCRC rights so they can speak up about their own rights.

For older young people, greater priority needs to be given to:

- Nurturing their creativity.
- Teaching them skills for healthy lifestyles, in a relevant way.

Overall, much more needs to be done to make sure that **every** child and young person feels valued and important in school.

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