

NAMIBIA

The right to freedom of expression through active participation in the teaching and learning environment

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1. Introduction

In a speech read on her behalf to Namibian CRC Change Agents at a Network meeting in Windhoek, the Deputy Minister of Education, Arts and Culture, Nghipondoka, E (2015) noted that:

In 1990 the Republic of Namibia ratified the United Nations Convention on Children's rights. This was a pledge and commitment to observe and implement children's rights in the country. To this effect we already have articles on children's enshrined in our constitution. I am glad this is already put in black and white; our greatest challenge is the implementation of the children's rights in our schools, homes and communities. (p. 4)

In an effort to improve the implementation children's rights in schools, Batch 20, Team Namibia implemented a change project titled: The right to freedom of expression through active participation in the teaching and learning environment. The project was concurrently carried out at two schools: a rural school, 'Onalulago Combined School' in Oshikoto Education Directorate and an urban school, 'Ongwediva Secondary School' in Oshana Education Directorate. This report outlines the activities carried out Batch 20. It consists of frame of reference, the purpose of this study, methodology, results, challenges and the way forward.

2. Frame of Reference

The Convention on the Rights of the Child Articles 6, 12 and 13 formulated by UNICEF (2007) makes the following emphasis on the rights of the children:

Article 3: The best interest of the child.

Article 12: The right to participation.

Article 13: The right to freedom of expression.

Namibia being one of the countries that ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in September 1990 it is obliged to observe and implement all the 42 substantive articles of the convention in a holistic manner. Children's rights are not isolated from other Human Rights in the Universal Declaration. The articles on children's rights are part of the bill of human rights. Namibia like many other states, two decades after, still faces challenges of closing the gap between ratification and physical implementation of the substantive articles of the Convention on the rights on the child in all parts of the country. The government's commitment towards the right of the freedom of expression and participation is manifested in the Constitution of the Republic, Chapter 3 Articles 15 (Children's Rights), 20 (Rights to Education) and 21, 1(a) which explains all persons [including children] shall have the right to "freedom of speech and expression" (Government of the Republic of Namibia [GRN], 2010, p.13).

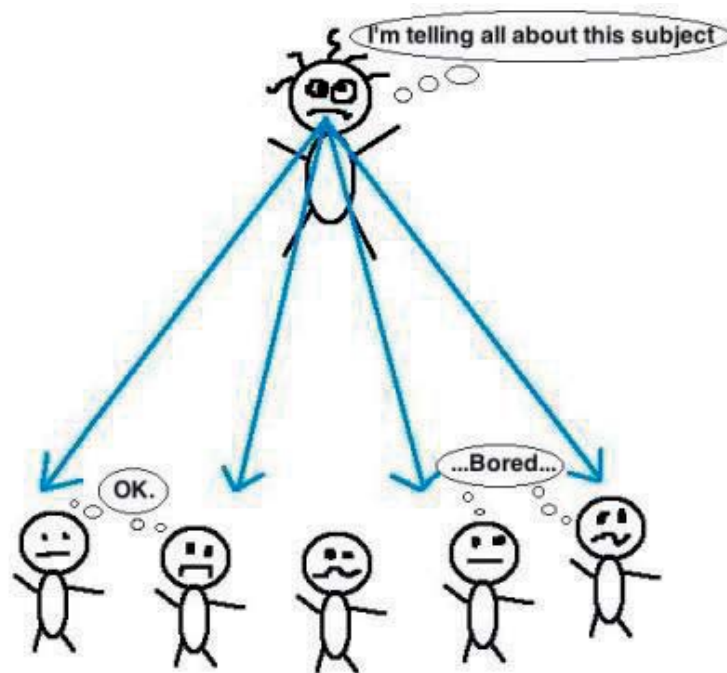


Figure 1. The Top-Down Approach

The reality in Namibia however reveals that the human rights referred to above are only enjoyed by a few (Ambunda & Mugadza, 1990, p.10). Children are often neglected as part of the citizens with human rights. This can be observed even in the classrooms at schools. The adults [teachers] dominate discussions, and take decisions without considering the children's voices.

The Children's Rights, particularly the freedom of expression and participation is in most cases infringed. According to Andersson (2015) the situation in schools is in most cases is characterised by a Top-down approach (figure 1). These are the classrooms that are teacher centred, the teacher makes all decisions, he does all the talking while the learners a passive recipients of knowledge. Paulo Freire describes this as the "oppressive depositing of information (banking) by teachers into the students" Micheletti, 2010, p.1)

In this situation only few learners benefit while many are bored and as such do not benefit from the lessons. Because of this situation, learners in classrooms are not given *opportunities to participate* and *express* their social, emotional or academic perspectives freely. In an African context learners are found in such situations due to factors shared with Ambunda & Muganza (1990) such as:

- Learners are not aware of their rights to the freedom of participation.
- Society and teachers in most cases stigmatise, demean or humiliate children who attempt to express their ideas or participate in management and leadership of teaching/learning activities.
- Cultural norms [practices] are hostile to children. Children may only participate as per the adult's wish, and they may not be allowed to argue or answer back or refute ideas of adults.

With the Learner-centred approach that Namibia embarked on after independence in 1990, children should be allowed to construct their own knowledge, through social interaction with teachers and other learners in the learning environment. (Ministry of Basic Education and Culture [MBEC], 2003). Through active participation they will be able to express their opinions for the betterment of the immediate teaching and learning environment. The rationale of LCE is however, hard to achieve if learners cannot participate freely in the teaching and learning, activities at school. It will also be unrealistic to expect them to suddenly become responsible, participating adult citizens without prior exposure to the skills and responsibilities thereof (rights with or and responsibilities) as expected by the Namibia nation in Article 17 (1) of the constitution (Political Activity), which states that: "All citizens shall have the right to participate in peaceful political activity intended to influence the composition and policies of the Government." (GRN, 2010, p.13).

It is thus important that learners are involved in meaningful projects with each other and with teachers where they construct and implement their own knowledge in Child friendly environments. Figure 2 show the desired new teacher learner relationship after the change.

The Right Based Approach – teacher vs learner

The teacher is changing her/his relation to the learner

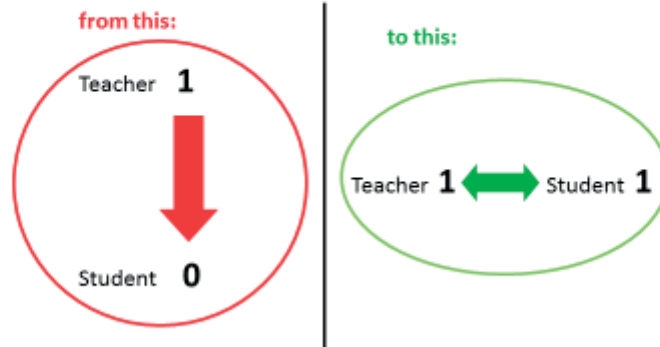


Figure 2. The Rights Based Approach

This is a lateral relationship where teachers and learners are equal partners in participation. This takes cognisance of the fact that children do not come to school as empty vessels, they have knowledge and skills in their own ways, and can contribute to the success of the school. No education is progressive unless it is making progress, towards a perspective of a give and gain process between teachers and learners (Andersson, 2015).

3. Purpose

The purpose of this project is to: Educate and sensitise the Directors of Oshana and Oshikoto Education Directorates, Inspectors of Education in Ompundja and Oshigambo Circuits; School Managers, Teachers, School Board Members and learners of Ongwediva Junior Secondary and Onalulago Combined Schools about the Convention of the Rights of the Child, especially Article 12: Freedom to Participation; Article 13: Freedom of Expression of views on matters affecting the child; Article 14: Freedom of Thought and Conscience; Article 15: Freedom of Association, Article 17: Right to information and Article 31: Right to Participation in recreational activities, cultural life and the arts. The project also aimed to demonstrate how provision of rights to participation improves academic performance and progress towards the creation of child friendly schools.

This is a pilot project aimed to work with the grade 8 learners and the Grade 9 learners of Onalulago Combined School, (a rural school) at Ongwediva Junior Secondary (an urban school) respectively. It is expected to run until these learners complete grade ten. The learners and teachers are expected to raise their understanding of the importance and benefits of freedom of expression through active participation in the school and classrooms.



Figure 3. The ultimate goal: Child Friendly School (Anesu Desmond Marongwe Batch 20, Change Agent)

The project also aims to improve the staff members' didactic competency (knowing how to talk and listen to children), leadership competence (knowing how to manage classrooms towards learner-centered methods and approaches) and relationship competence (how to build stable, warm relations with learners from diverse backgrounds). At the end of the project we hoped to have helped teachers to employ methods that will promote critical thinking. This transition is expounded by Andersson (2015) as follows:

FROM	TO
Giving information- asking questions –given directions	Involve learners in problems – then they will ask questions which are relevant to them
Making assignments/homework - reviewing them	Help learners to see major concepts, big ideas and general principles - not only basic skills
Giving tests – reviewing tests	Involve them in planning, responsibility, give them real choices that promote decision making and self esteem
Marking and giving grades	

4. Methodology

In order to achieve the purpose of this project, various activities were carried out. The first activity was to *familiarize the two Regional Directors* about the program and to introduce the project to them. It was necessary that the Directors are familiar with the project for the granting of permission and funding of all activities related to the implementation of this project.

The *second activity* was a *visit* to the schools to *meet the School Management* and School board members and teaching staff, to share with them what CRC is, its aims and objects; and to seek permission to pilot the projects in their schools.

After permission was granted, the team conducted a *baseline study* with the targeted group: the English and Mathematics teachers, learners in grade 8 (Onalulago CS) and grade 9 (Ongwediva JSS). We targeted the Mathematics and English teachers because our team consists of English and Mathematics subject specialists. The baseline study was done through lesson observations and questionnaires whereby the teachers, learners and school board members were the respondents.

The *fourth activity* was a *briefing meeting for the Directors*, Chief Education Officers, Inspectors of Education, Cluster centre principals; principals and target teachers from the piloting schools. This meeting was conducted by Ms Lena Andersson, the mentor for Namibian. The presence of Ms Andersson was necessary to affirm and cement our earlier discussion with the regional and schools management. It was also necessary that inspectors of circuits other than Oshigambo and Ompundja are well-versed about the implementation of CRC should this project be extended to schools in their circuits.

Having identified the short falls, *training materials* were developed for teachers and learners. Due to time constraint we could not conduct trainings for the school board members. The training workshops focused on the understanding of CRC, participation, freedom of expression; and children rights and responsibilities. It aimed at ensuring child friendly schools through equipping teachers and learners with good classroom management and organizing skills, social relationship building skills and good com-



Figure 4 .Namibian Mentor, Lena Andersson addressing the teachers, principals and inspectors of Education.



Figure 5. Training Workshop for Learners and Teachers at Onalulago Combined School.

munication skills in any learning environment. Teachers were also enlightened on good teaching methods to ensure participation that will provide learners with the means by which they can engage in processes of change that will bring about the realization of their rights, and prepare them for an active part in society and change.

Rights to Participation: these are the rights that provide children with the means by which they can engage in processes of change that will bring about the realization of their rights, and prepare them for an active part in society and change.

Because the workshops aimed at achieving the same objectives for both teachers and learners, the workshop content was exactly the same but responded to, from the level and perspectives of the participants. The training workshops for the two schools were conducted on different dates, and the sessions for the participants were parallel, in different venues.

5. Results

The *baseline results* had four sets of data obtained from the following tools:

- Learners' Questionnaire
- Teachers' Questionnaire
- School Board's Questionnaire
- Lesson observation

Our purpose for the *questionnaires* was to establish the teachers, learners and School board members' level of understanding with regard to children's rights and responsibilities, to establish whether learners are accorded opportunity to participate freely and express themselves freely in teaching or learning environment, to establish teachers' attitude towards learner participation and freedom of expression, and to establish hindrances of effective participation and communication.

The *Lesson observations* were used as a means of validating teachers' and learners' responses from the questionnaires.

5.1 Results from the Questionnaires

a) Learner's questionnaires

i) Ongwediva Secondary School

Thirty (30) learners completed the questionnaires at *Ongwediva Secondary School*. 16 of them had a clear knowledge and good understanding of the concept Freedom of expression, participation, children rights and responsibilities; 10 learners had little knowledge about these and 4 had no idea of what freedom of expression, participation, children's rights and responsibilities is all about.

Most learners said that they are allowed to freely express their thoughts without offending other parties. However few learners failed to define what freedom of expression, participation, children rights and responsibilities. All learners have indicated that their teachers do give them an opportunity to express their views and that their teachers value their contributions and respect their thoughts. 26 learners were aware of the importance of freedom of speech and expression to them and that it is within a boundary, and 4 of them had no clue of the importance of freedom of speech and expression to them.

In conclusion, the solicited the responses showed that the learners' understanding of freedom of expression and participation; and the exercise of these concepts was mainly limited to classroom activities. Expression and participation in out-of-classroom activities was limited to teacher initiated activities.

ii) Onalulago Combined School

A purposively selected sample of nine out of twenty seven learners completed the questionnaire at *Onalulago Combined School*. Six of these learners had a clear knowledge understanding of freedom of expression, participation, children rights and responsibilities; one learner had little knowledge about these, and two had no idea of what freedom of expression, participation, children rights and responsibilities is all about.

Five learners indicated that they are given an opportunity to express their views and that their teachers value their contributions and respect their thoughts, three felt they are not given the opportunity and one learner could not tell. All the nine learners were aware of the importance of freedom of speech and expression to them and that it is within a boundary.

As it was the case with the Ongwediva Secondary School, the solicited responses from questionnaires showed that the learners' understanding of freedom of expression and participation; and the exercise of these concepts was mainly limited to classroom activities. This is because the examples of activities they give to prove that they are allowed to express themselves and participate freely were:

- "We are allowed to ask questions in class" and
- "We are allowed to attend lessons, study and do homework".

Participation in out-of-classroom activities limited to teacher initiated activities. For example participation of Learner Representative Committee [LRC] in a school board meeting is initiated by the school management committee.

b) Results from teachers' questionnaires

i) Ongwediva Junior Secondary School,

A summary of the data gathered from the English and Mathematics teachers indicates that the teachers understand the concept "freedom of expression participation, children rights and responsibilities". They all agreed that they strive to encourage free participation through teaching and learning activities. They expressed that some learners are afraid to talk in class because they are laughed at by classmates. The teachers also indicated that they are not comfortable with learners correcting them in the classroom, as this embarrasses them.

ii) Onalulago Combined School

The data gathered from the English and Mathematics teachers at the school indicates that the teachers have a relatively poor understand of the concepts "freedom of expression, participation, children rights and responsibilities". They all agreed that they strive to encourage freedom to participate in teaching and learning activities. They expressed that some learners are afraid to talk in class because they are laughed at by classmates. They indicated that they comfortable with learners correcting them in the classroom.

We could also conclude that, as it is with the learners, the teachers' understanding of freedom of expression, participation, children's rights and responsibilities was mostly limited to classroom situation. Learners' involvement in out-of-classroom teaching and learning was very minimal.

c) Results from the School Board Questionnaire

Unfortunately time could not allow the team to get the School Board members at Onalulago together in order to complete the Questionnaire. However, all the four school board members at Ongwediva Secondary School showed good understanding about the concept in question, as the right to expression of personal views and ideas without being intimidated, giving learners opportunities to ask and express themselves without fear, and allowing learners to participate and contribute freely during the lesson.

They all responded that they would advise the school to let learners participate in teaching and learning activities and allow them to take part in decision making and air their views and comment freely. They also stated that they will encourage and motivate teachers to always listen to the learners' contributions and respect and value their ideas.

All the board members indicated that even though the majorities of the learners have good knowledge of what freedom of speech and expression is, most of them are still shy and due to cultural bound many will not be able to express themselves as they wish.

6. Reflection and Discussion

Most learners know and understand their rights to participation, but because of their cultural beliefs and norms, they tend to withhold their thoughts, opinions and views about the activities they participate in. Learners from Ongwediva Secondary school could explain that their rights have boundaries and they come along with responsibilities.

Results from the Lesson Observations

- a) The findings from the Ongwediva Junior Secondary School showed that teaching and learning process takes place in a positive atmosphere through interaction between learners and teachers. The methods of teaching as well as the leadership style employed, opened enough avenues for the learners to fully express themselves orally, in writing or using body language. So, learners participated actively and freely without fear. They were able to answer questions posed, and asked questions without hesitation to the teacher to explain and clarified information which was not clear. Learners with learning difficulties and language barriers were free and open to participate and could express themselves without fear. The learners interacted well among themselves and were free to articulate their thoughts without fear during the discussion. For example, in the English lesson learners suggested to the teacher how and what attire they wanted to wear when acting out poems they read on the day of the visit.
- b) The findings from the observations at *Onalulago Combined School* showed that in grade 8 the teaching and learning environment was not conducive for active participation. The classroom was overcrowded, leaving very limited space for learner-to-learner interaction. As a result teachers rarely planned teaching and learning activities which required learners to move around the classroom. No communicative activities or cooperative activities were observed in both English and Mathematics lessons. The methods of teaching as well as the leadership style did not open enough avenues for the learners to fully express themselves orally, in writing or using body language. The learners were mostly passive listeners who spoke only when answering questions posted by the teachers. The Maths teacher was authoritative and egocentric using commands like “I don’t want”, “I need”, “Put your pens down!” This showed that there was no employment of negotiation, persuasion approach during the lesson. There was no respect of other learners’ opinions in the English lesson because other learners laughed and jeered at those who gave wrong answers, and those who could not express themselves fluently in English.

Overall Conclusion on the Baseline Study

Although the analysis of teachers and learners questionnaires, of the lesson observation and of the School Board Questionnaires revealed that the two schools were at different level of understanding with regard to participation, freedom of expression, children rights and responsibilities, we still felt that the content of the training should be the same, and that the extent to which each topic would be discussed, would depend on the participants' understanding. Each school was trained separately and on different dates.

Each workshop had three phases: *Teachers on their own, learners on their own and teachers and learners combined*. The third phase was necessary for participants to harmonise the impact of the initiated change, thus allowing participants to demonstrate their understanding of the workshop.

Both workshops focussed on ensuring proper understanding of CRC, participation, freedom of expression and children's rights as well as highlighting teachers and learners' responsibilities for effective creation of a child friendly schools. During the combined session of the workshop teachers and learners were asked to dramatize scenarios with challenges that are phased by teachers and learners in creating child-friendly classrooms and schools. The last activity of the workshop was a planning session for activities to be carried at schools.

Results from the workshop follow up visit

After the workshops, follow up visits were carried out to the two schools. The purpose of these visits was to assess the impact of the workshops. This was done by determining and analysing the activities teachers and learners engaged themselves in, after the workshop, and challenges they experienced in implementing their planned activities. We could unfortunately not carry out lesson observation, as the schools were busy with the August examinations during this period. However, we could conduct meetings with teachers and learners separately.

a) Onalulago Combined School

i) Meeting with Teachers:

The teachers held a meeting with teachers who did not attend the meeting grades 1-4 teachers, in order to brief them about the workshop content. This was the only activity the teachers did. Although teachers were given a document on Cooperative Learning to try out in their lessons, they could not explain success or challenges in implementing this document. Teachers also felt that it is necessary that all learners receive the same training for them to sing the same understanding as the grade nine learners.

Teachers at Onalulago have also shared with us the following about the learners:

Positive Observations	Negative Observations
Learners are more actively involved in teaching learning activities during lessons	Learners speak out of turn, infringing the teacher's right to explain or present.
They ask more questions than they use to do before the training	Despite learners' active performance, their academic performance did not improve.
Learners initiated activities to do at morning devotion, ensuring order and singing while waiting for everyone to gather.	Girls became carefree in expressing themselves- putting on hats in class, having loose, untidy hair.
After taking a thin porridge during break, teachers have observed grade 9 allowing lower grades learners (grade 1-4) to wash their plates first, and they sometimes offer to wash the plates for them.	
They assist with classroom leadership.	
They improved classroom environment by creating subject corners, where they displayed subject related materials.	

i) Meeting with learners:

There was evidence from the meeting that they have accepted the workshop content and have showed willingness towards creating a more child-friendly school:

- The first thing they did after the school was to clean their classroom. According to them they had to do this so that they give other grades a good example.
- They then grouped themselves into 6six groups. Each group was allocated a class to share the workshop content with.
- They elected a class council which would be responsible to manage the class affairs and be the link between the different teachers and grade 9.

At the end of the meeting, the Change Agents highlighted the areas of concern (bad observations) the teachers have shared with them, and advised them on improving on them.

b) Ongwediva Secondary School

i) Meeting with teachers

From the workshop, it was evident that most teachers had a better understanding of their roles in ensuring learner participation in classroom and out-of-classroom activities. Teachers at this school also had the following to share with us:



Figure 6. From left: (a) The Mentor Lena Andersson with Onalulago learners. (b) Elizabeth Valombola Batch 20, Change Agent with Ongwediva learners. (c) Change Agents and the Mentor from left; Samuel Edegware Batch 18, Mirjam D. D. Mbango Batch 20, Mentor Lena Andersson and Elizabeth Valombola Batch 20. (d) Parental Involvement in CRC, Mentor Lena with Onalulago Parents.

Positive Observations	Negative Observations
Learners are more actively involved in teaching/ learning activities during lessons.	For some unknown reasons, some teachers opted to focus on human rights in general instead of focussing on right to participate. This created conflict, but luckily on a very low scale.
Teachers could observe that learners challenged teachers in a more polite and responsible manner.	
Actively participate in tree planting projects	

i) Meeting with Learners:

Learners at the school shared the following with us:

- They had a better understanding of the fact that rights comes with responsibilities.
- Teachers were able to create warm relationships with them and they handled learners' challenges with patience and tolerance.

It is worth noting, that at both schools we could observe that teachers and learners have taken ownership of the projects. They are even engaged in tree planting to make their school more inviting.

Mentor's visit

As part of quality control, mentors visit change project to assess the impact of the training. The mentor's visit is also a good opportunity for the Change Agents to observe the school sharing their experiences and benefits from the Change Projects. The Regional Directors, Inspectors of Education, School Board Members were invited to attend this day.

1. Ongwediva Secondary School

The observation from this day complemented the findings which were observed on the workshop follow-up visit. Both teachers and learners were able to present what they have learnt from the Change project. They all participated in organizing the events of day, and the role-play had clear message about Child Rights.

2. Onalulago Combined School

We also observed involvement by teachers and learners in the day's event. The teacher and learner directed the proceeding of the day. However, the presentation and the role play by learners could give clear evidence that they had really understood the concepts of child rights. We also observed that teachers did not render enough assistance to learners in preparing.

7. Challenges:

It was not easy for all team members to meet the due dates due to responsibilities related to their designations.

- Although the team had initially planned. Because learners' understanding of freedom of expression is still low and in most cases they do it disrespectful manner, the team had to change the of the project focus from freedom of expression to 'Right to participation'. The team felt that focussing on Rights to participation will require teachers to think of appropriate activities to engage learners in and in the process unconsciously allow learners to express themselves.
- There were cases where the team's available time and the schools' calendar of activities could not allow progress. For example, we could not carry out the follow-up lesson observation, as schools were busy with examinations, and when schools were ready for our visits, we could be occupied elsewhere.
- Although we could observe that the schools are trying to take ownership of the projects, the level of commitment from teachers' is relatively low. For example we gave the strategies on Cooperative Learning to try out, which will ensure participation and positive learning outcome, but it was not evident that they indeed did use them. Hence, the need for more lesson observation.
- The team did also not receive the expected support from one of the regions. As such the team had to use its personal funds to ensure that training takes place.
- Also, the team failed to appoint a project monitor at Onalulago Combined School; this affected the evaluation of activities and preparations for the mentor's visit.

8. Way Forward

In order to further verify and improve the outcomes of the project, the team intends to do the following:

- Carry our lesson observation to see how participation is ensured during lesson.
- Meet with the School board members for the Onalulago Combined School for them to complete the Questionnaire.
- Train Classroom council to equip them with skills to create a child friendly school.
- Meet with teachers at Ongwediva Secondary School to explain why focusing on human rights in general will do more harm than good.
- If the projects at the two schools yield good fruit, the project will be extended to other schools in the regions.
- Appoint a project monitor at Onalulago Combined School.

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