

A Minor Field Study on Student Participation through Class and School Councils in Copperbelt Province, Zambia

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Abstract

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Title: A Minor Field Study on Student Participation through Class and School Councils in Copperbelt Province, Zambia.

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The purpose of this Minor Field Study is to describe and analyse student participation through class and school councils as a way of increasing child rights at a school level and democracy at a national level. Class and school councils are new concepts in Zambia in the work towards the child's right to participation as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child article 12. They were established in 2007 through an international training programme: *The Child Rights, Classroom and School Management*, initiated by Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and in collaboration with Lund University.

From a socio-cultural perspective, this study was conducted as a case study at one target high school in Copperbelt Province and based on several observations, four focus-groups interviews with students and three semi-structured interviews with a teacher and link-teachers. Childhood sociology is served as a theoretical framework in the analysis where childhood is seen as a social construction and children are viewed as active participants in the society, contributing to reproduction and societal changes. Even though most of the previous research revealed on the subject has shown poor outcomes, that the establishment of class and school councils is not enough to include students in real decision-making processes, the results from our study are mostly positive. Student participation as well as the relationship between students and teachers seems to have increased and the students, both in- and outside the school council, experience that they are listened to, that their voices are taken into consideration and that they are a part of decision-making processes at the school.

Key words: Student participation, child rights, class and school council, childhood sociology, socio-cultural context

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1. Introduction and Statement of the Problem

“Increasing participation is, at root, about extending the goal of democracy to ensure that all citizens – including the youngest – are prepared and able to contribute to shaping their own lives, their community and wider society” (Kirby & Woodhead 2003, p. 262). The culture of democracy implies that people learn to argue for their opinions and listen to the arguments of others, that they are prepared to change their views or to accept defeat in a vote. The earlier this is practiced and learnt, the better a democratic culture is established (Rubenson 1999).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), established in 1989, is usually described as a moral action plan where school is an arena for implementing children’s rights and improving children’s everyday life in school (Thelander 2009). A common abbreviation on the CRC is the child’s right to provision, protection and participation, usually referred to as ‘the three pillars’ or ‘the three P: s’, can be seen as a starting point for working on the meaning and content of CRC (Bequele 2010; Wickenberg et al 2009; Habashi et al 2010). In the context of implementing the rights of the child, not least the right to participation, the perceptions of what children can or should do, or not do, depends upon the socio-cultural context of that society (Stern 2006). Traditionally, children have been regarded as objects in need of as well as deserving protection and not as individuals with rights equal to the rights of adults. Still, adults are commonly perceiving children in a forward-looking way, in what the child will become, without given childhood a value in itself (Corsaro 2005).

The right to participation, as defined in article 12 (see appendix 1), is one of the core principles of the CRC and is referred to as the ‘democracy article’. In short terms, article 12 states that the child has the right to act and being involved in decision-making matters that concern them and emphasis children as social competent actors, with both rights and abilities to participate (Stern 2006). Although, children are and have often been left behind in issues related to participation and decision-making processes and the article is considered to be the most radical and difficult to implement. As a consequence, the article is more than often being ignored (Corsaro 2005, Stern 2006). This is frequently justified by referring to cultural traditions, where the adults’ attitudes towards children and child participation are being challenged (Thelander 2009). One of the underlying assumptions is the perception of the child as someone who should “be seen and not heard”.

The importance of children's right to participate in decision-making cannot be underestimated. A general held idea concerning children's participation, at least in international law, is that participation is beneficial both for children in their process towards becoming responsible and autonomous adults, as well as for the society as a whole. In this sentence, school as an institution plays a fundamental role in children's development and their incorporation of values and norms, as well as in promoting children's rights to participate in decision-making. In fact, the school can be seen as a micro-society itself with its own power-relations, culture, rules and relationships which enhance the importance of children's participation. While the right to education represents a provisional right, different rights in and through education, including the students' right to participation, concerns more fundamental democratic rights (Thelander 2009). Through participation, children learn the rules and processes of democracy (Stern 2006).

Especially in developing countries, very few good examples of child participation have been revealed (Hart 1992). This is not surprising as most of the research on children's participation primarily has been conducted in Western contexts and rarely in other parts of the world (Stern 2006; Ehlers & Frank 2008). But from our opinion, it does not mean that it is of less importance. The main idea behind CRC is to accept that cultural and other circumstances will, and should, have an impact on what is best for the child in its particular context, as long as the outcome is compatible with the values of CRC (Stern 2006).

However, during the last decades, in line with the development within the field of human rights, several initiatives to increase children's democratic participation has been designed and scattered, such as setting up school councils, child right clubs and other youth forums (Kirby & Woodhead 2003). In 2003, *The Child Rights, Classroom and School Management programme*, initiated by Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and in collaboration with Lund University, was one of the first International Training Programmes that actively started to work towards the goal of fulfilling the CRC in developing countries. The overall aim of the project is to contribute to capacity development and processes of change in developing countries by offering key persons training, focusing on empowering children to, in, and through education (Wickenberg et al. 2009). Ever since the programme was initiated, Zambia has been one of the participant countries and has chosen to work towards increasing student participation in line with CRC article 12. At the moment, the country is on its way of increasing democracy at a national level and in the preface of

changing the relationship between adults and children. Recently, class and school councils have been established in every high school in Copperbelt Province (Chishiko et al. 2009). Even though the results reported by the change agents have been very positive, the process of increasing democracy is not a straight forward process as it disrupts conventional expectations about power, authority and the role of children. It challenges the traditional relationship between adults and children in most of African societies, where children are excluded from participating in all kind of decisions (Ncube 1998).

With the lack of research from a socio-cultural perspective combined with poor researches on child participation within the field of social work, we want to draw attention to the importance of student participation as a way of increasing democracy in developing countries with their culture taking into account. We will focus on the experiences of student participation through class and school councils in the Zambian context; by the way the students are entitled to express their views in this democratic set up.

1.1. Purpose of the Study and the Questions at Issue

The purpose of this Minor Field Study is to describe and analyse student participation through class and school councils in the perspective of students, teachers and link-teachers at a target high school in Copperbelt Province, Zambia.

1. How are the class and school councils organised and operated at our target school in relation to student participation?
2. What do the concepts 'student participation' and 'class and school councils' mean to the students, teachers and link-teachers?
3. Which are the experiences of student participation through class and school councils in the perspective of the students, teachers and link-teachers?

2. Background

2.1. Basic facts about Zambia

Zambia is a Sub-Saharan African country located in the South Central of Africa with an area of 752,614 sq km. The country is landlocked with a tropical climate and consists mostly of high plateau. The total population of the country is 12.9 million people with a life expectancy as low as the age of 45. The capital city is Lusaka with around 1 450 000 inhabitants, located

in the middle of the country. Zambia is administered through nine provinces and 72 districts, where Copperbelt Province is found in the north east of the country (BBC News 2010).

The official language in Zambia is English, although, the country is populated by more than 70 different ethnical groups, many of them Bantu-speaking. The major religion is Christianity followed by indigenous beliefs, Hinduism and Islam. Zambia is a former British colony and became independent in 1964. Politically, it switched from colonial government into an era of one-party rule lasting for 27 years. A multi-party system emerged in the early 1990s, but since 2008, Zambia is ruled by President Mr. Banda. From being one of the continents richest countries in 1964, Zambia has become one of the poorest countries in the world (ibid.).

2.2. Education System

About a third of the population in Zambia is between the ages of 7-18 years (BBC News 2010). As a result, the education system has experienced high pressure in providing adequate school education to every child in school going age.

Every province has its own provincial education office, which are responsible for education delivery at every level. Copperbelt Province is recognised as one of the leading provinces concerning education standard (Central Statistical Office Zambia and ORC Macro 2003). Currently, Zambia has a formal education system with seven years of basic school, five years of secondary school and four years of university and colleges. The government, who runs most of the schools through the Ministry of Education, has abolished school fees in basic schools. In order to Education Reforms, Zambia has a long standing goal stating that every child who enters grade one in basic school, should be able to complete grade nine in secondary school. Still, drop out from primary school is very common (Libindo et al. 1996). The Zambian government has recognised the important role education plays in grooming morally and intellectually upright individuals with the intentions of using the acquired skills and knowledge for the overall development of the country standard (Central Statistical Office Zambia and ORC Macro 2003). Since Zambia ratified the CRC in 1991, the government has incorporated legal instruments and recently, corporal punishment in school was abolished (Soneson 2005).

2.3. Establishment of Class and School Councils in Copperbelt Province

In September 2007, the first team from Copperbelt Province of Zambia participated in *The Child Rights, Classroom and School Management programme* (<http://www.o.education.lu.se/o.o.i.s/2686>). At the time, Copperbelt Province of Zambia had undergone a sudden increase in learners' demonstrations in a number of high schools in various districts. The demonstrations were attributed to non-participation of learners in issues that concerned those (Banda et al. 2008). As a part of the project, the participants from Copperbelt Province intended to introduce class and school councils at three pilot high schools. The aim of the project was to give a forum for learners to participate in decision-making. The members of the school councils were chosen through democratic means where students were given the chance to vote for their class representatives through secret ballot (ibid.).

In November 2009, a second Zambian team from the Copperbelt Province participated in the training programme and continued to work with the already started project. The team was composed of three people, all employed at the Ministry of Education in Copperbelt Province with strategic positions at provincial and district level in the school system. The aim of the project, called "Child Rights Implementation in Zambia: Evaluating the impact in three schools on the Copperbelt", was to further explore students' participation by the way of expressing their views and to evaluate the extent to which students, teachers and head-teachers understand their roles and involvement in school councils (Chishiko et al. 2009).

By now, class and school councils are established in all high schools in Copperbelt Province. The results reported by the teams and the high schools are in general very positive (ibid.). According to the mentor's report, Copperbelt Province has requested to be a model province in Zambia to the future development of democracy at schools in Zambia (Rasmusson 2010). Even though the projects have been completed, the activities with student participation through class and school councils continue.

3. Previous Research

As mentioned in the introduction, most of the research on children's participation has been conducted in Western context and rarely in other parts of the world (Stern 2006; Ehlers & Frank 2008). Over the last decades, the perception of the child has changed and the child rights to participate have grown stronger. As a result, research on child participation has drastically increased. However, most of the research that we found on the subject of this thesis was in the field of human right law, sociology and pedagogic subjects. Some socio-cultural considerations regarding the concept of child and child participation was found in related subjects such as anthropology and geography, but in the field of social work it is still an almost totally absence. Therefore, most of the previous research drawn up in this chapter is borrowed from related subjects to the field of social work. However, it does not mean it is of less importance for the social work field. As UNICEF (2008) has declared; education is one of the most important ways out of poverty and vulnerability.

3.1. Views upon Children and Childhood

Before analysing student participation, it is important to clarify both the concept of child as well as participation as they are multiplexed and socio-cultural concepts. Children have often been ignored in many fields and commonly they have been marginalised because of their subordinate position in societies (Corsaro 2005). This is highly unfortunate because children are representing one of the most vulnerable groups in societies. Traditionally, children have been regarded as irrational *per se* and therefore dependent on parents and other adults until they are able to take care of themselves. Children have primarily been seen as part of the family unit and not as autonomous individuals with specific rights (Stern 2006). In many societies, this is still an underlying assumption.

From an African cultural context of childhood, children are often perceived in lower position than adults and socialised to always respect the elders (Ncube 1998; Porter et al 2010). Further, children are considered as some "who belong to everyone" and are not only obligated to their parents, but also to other adults and elders. Children should "rather be seen and not heard", which generates in a greater gap between adults and children (Ncube 1998; Lansdown 2001). For example, in many regions and cultures other than West, young people are sometimes regarded as being adults much earlier than the age of 18 and in other cultures, later in life (Stern 2006). At the same time, children of the same age in one society may be treated

as competent and responsible in one area of life, but immature and dependent in another, which can be understood by looking to the particular socio-cultural context (Woodhead & Montgomery 2003). Even though the majority of the African countries have ratified the CRC and rely on the conception of the child as someone below the age of 18, more commonly, the specific age of the child is not paid any specific consideration in determine when the child enters into adulthood (Ncube 1998; Lansdown 2001).

3.2. Child Participation

The child's right to participation is a fundamental part of citizenship and the means by which democracy is established, important and valuable both to the individual child and to the society as a whole (Hart 1992; Stern 2006). Children, as well as adults, are a part of society and should be recognised as a group which can make valuable contributions to the society. From a societal perspective, child participation serves a way of deepening democracy for the future and contributes to the establishment of peace and security in the world. At a micro level, it can benefit the child in his or her development on the journey towards autonomy and responsibility (Stern 2006).

According to the CRC, article 12, child participation is defined as the right to take part in decision-making processes affecting one's life and the life of community in which one live which capture the interactive and democratic aspects regarding participation. However, the concept of participation is often given the simple meaning as being "listened to" or "consulted" which have very passive undertones (Sinclair 2004). Further, the child's right to participation is not a priority and national data on child participation is almost nonexistent (Stern 2006; Bequele 2010). This is not surprising when considering that children have few possibilities to make their voices heard in public spheres and to demand that they are listened to (Stern 2006). A democratic responsibility is reached only through practice and involvement and does not suddenly arise as the child enters into adulthood, without involving children from the beginning to become competent and participating citizens (Matthews and Limb 1999).

As a conclusion, true child participation includes that the child is seen as an active agent who can contribute to the society as a whole. It means that the child is provided with adequate information, that children's views are taken into account and that they are treated respectfully and are given proper feedback in all matters affecting them (Rasmusson 2011).

3.2.1. The Child as a Right-holder

When children as right-holders are being discussed, the values underpinning the idea of children as possible bearers of rights must be considered as a crucial element to that discussion (Stern 2006). Being able to exercise a participation right presupposes that the individual child embraces a certain measure of capacity. According to CRC article 12, children's views are to be respected and taken into account in *all* matters affecting them and must involve all levels at society. There is no lower age limit imposed on the exercise of the right to participation. When children experience respect and consideration for their views, they can also discover the importance of respect for the views of others (ibid.).

Further, article 12 emphasises that it is not sufficient to simply listen to children. On the other hand, the article does not give children the right to be in control of all decisions affecting them nor reducing the rights of their parents. Listening to children does not necessarily mean accepting what they say or allowing them to take control over the decisions that affect them. What it means is to respect children's views and their status as stakeholders in any decisions affecting them. This requires that adults are creating opportunities for children to express their feelings in a way appropriate to their abilities and interest. It also means that the adults need to be guiding and supporting children's participation in a positive way and not merely focus on whether or not they are competent to participate. This is an obligation and not a proclamation to be questioned (Stern 2006).

3.3. Class and school councils

3.3.1. School as an institution

Education plays a fundamental role in the overall development of a nation. It is for this reason that education has been declared by many countries as a human rights issue (Central Statistical Office Zambia and ORC Macro 2003). Particularly, in young democracies with young populations, such as Zambia, schools are an important arena in the development of democratic values (Rasmusson 2011). More or less, a lot of children of today spend a significant part of their upbringing in different public spheres, such as school settings (Thelander 2006). Traditionally, school settings have been built around the authority of adults over children (Kirby & Woodhead 2003). In most cases in Zambia, both teachers and school administration have been, and, in many cases, still are perceiving students as one who should be told what to do, because he or she is too immature to make decisions. At the same time,

there has been a lot of social distance between teachers and students which makes the establishment of democratic processes difficult (Siamwiza 1989; Thelander 2009). According to Rasmusson (2011), the school system in many African countries are characterised with a strict hierarchical structure and in many cases marked by corruption, with a lack of resources and undeveloped infrastructure. For example, in overcrowded classrooms in the schools in Zambia, children hardly have time to discuss important matters with their teachers. In addition, there is evidence that teachers rarely give children the space to participate actively in decision-making in schools. One explanation given is that the teachers fear to lose their authority, control and power amongst the children (Siamwiza 1989; Thelander 2009). Ncube (1998) stresses that the knowledge of the rights of the child needs to be encouraged at all levels at schools, not at least amongst the teachers. As teachers and students increase their awareness of the rights of the child, together with gaining social mobilisation strategies, rapid changes can take place (Rasmusson 2011).

Above the already mentioned, there are additional positive aspects with increasing student participation. From a micro-perspective, through active participation in schools, students can develop a feeling of being important, feeling welcomed and appreciated (de Winter et al 1999). From a meso-perspective, student consultation and participation is a way of improving the overall physical environment in schools. In fact, school environment is emerged as one of the most important factors affecting the quality of student's learning in school (Flutter 2006).

3.3.2. Student Participation through Class and School Councils

A common way of increasing student participation at schools is to give students opportunities to bring out comments, for example, in a suggestion-box. Through a suggestion-box available at school, every student is given a chance to identify problems associated with the school environment and give feedback on existing learning conditions. As a result, that means if applied in the accurate way, useful information about aspects of the school environment can be obtained. Although it increases students' possibilities to have a say in important matters, it seems apparent that students need to be involved into proper discussions to make valid contributions (Flutter 2006).

Particularly, class and school councils are a way of giving students an opportunity to participate in decision-making. Through listening to students voices, valuable insight can be gained. Class and school councils help students develop creative life skills, such as team-working, problem-solving, communication, negotiation and citizenship, which alter in good

confidence and self-belief (Flutter 2006). But, without improving other aspects of the school, there is a risk that the class and school councils make democracy to a decoration without any further meanings and reasons (Morrow 1999; Alderson 2000; Allan & I ‘Anson 2004). For example, many students have expressed a feeling of ignorance and that they are not being truly listened to, even though they are given several opportunities to participate in all kind of decisions through class and school councils. It appears that it does not matter how many opportunities students are invited to participate, students know that their minority status is not always negotiable and have poor affect on the outcomes (Sinclair & Franklin 2000; Thelander 2009). Another difficulty with increasing student participation through class and school councils is to ensure that the views from the majority of students are fairly represented, and, not mainly expressed by the executive students, such as class and school council’s representatives (Flutter 2006). Significantly, students who are reporting that their school have effective class and school councils generally have a very positive attitude towards the overall social and academic aspects of school life, whereas those who feel that their class and school councils are ineffective have more negative views (Kirby & Woodhead 2003). To conclude, it seems that initiating class and school councils is not enough to involve children in decision-making processes. Other deeper structural and relational changes in the culture and organisation of the school are required (Alderson 2000).

3.3.3. Empowerment and Power Relationship

A common objection in relation to child participation in general, and student participation in particular, is that the involvement of children does not give “real” power to children and that the so called “involvement” fails to include certain groups of children, those who are already being disadvantaged (Thomas 2007). When it comes to children’s participation in decision-making, children are often regarded as semi-citizens who are not entrusted with the power to exercise influence, regardless of the benefits this might have for the individual child and the society as a whole (Stern 2006).

“Power” is a complex concept that can be found in many different levels and exercised in several ways. It can be characterized as a relational concept as power only can be exercised in interaction with other actors or groups. In adult-child relations, the element of power in decision-making processes is controversial and perhaps problematic in many ways. Adult power over children can be exercised in many ways; openly such as when adults tells children what they should do and are expecting the children to obey without questioning, and more

subtle, such as to always carry respect for adult authorities, which are power values upon most of us (Stern 2006).

The combination of “children” and “power” challenges the social order where children by definition are subordinate to adults in the hierarchy of power, influence and status (Stern 2006). In fact, children’s involvement in decision-making processes in most societies have rather been seen as a part of their learning-process, to become responsible citizens for the future, in contradiction to let the child’s views be worthy of proper consideration (Sinclair 2004). The more traditional and conservative society, the stricter its power hierarchies usually are, and, the more likely it is that children’s views and wishes are not seen as being particularly important (Stern 2006).

However, increased participation does not remove all the authority and responsibility from adults. Adults are still possessed with the authority to have a final say in matters related to the child and the responsibility to ensure that the child’s best interest are perceived in all matters affecting the child (ibid.). At the same time, fundamental and genuine child participation in decision-making includes that children have influence over the decisions that are made. It means that children are given adequate information that is relevant to them (Sinclair & Franklin 2000). Exercising influence is a way of exercising power and changes the power structure from a top-down to a bottom-up model (Habashi et al. 2010). This process, of becoming someone who can exercise influence and control of one’s own situation, of going from “object” to “agent”, is frequently referred to as “empowerment”. Over the last decades, the concept of empowerment has appeared in various contexts and more recently, empowerment has been considered to be an essential tool for understanding child rights and attaining equality by changing existing unequal power structures (Stern 2006). Empowering children means that adult needs to “rethink” how to share their power with children (Sinclair & Franklin 2000). In fact, children will only be participating in decision-making when they feel empowered and can be a positive experienced for all involved, not only for children (Stern 2006).

4. Theoretical Frame of Reference

4.1. The Sociology of Childhood

4.1.1. A Social Construction

The conception and perception of children and childhood are often regarded as facts, which means, as “a will of nature” and not as something rooted in social contexts. While the immaturity of children is a biological fact, the way in which that immaturity is understood and made meaningful, is a fact of culture (Ncube 1998; Woodhead & Montgomery 2003). This means that referring to a ‘child perspective’ and using terminologies such as ‘child’ and ‘childhood’ is problematic, very complex and has changed over time. In fact, the ways in which societies are regarding children are not, and have never been, the same over the world. Childhood is a social construction given different cultural meanings in different socio-cultural contexts (Ncube 1998; Stern 2006). For example, a ‘child perspective’ can refer to children’s perspective in general or, an individual child’s perspective in particular. Presenting a ‘child perspective’ can be done simply by inquiring the individual child itself, where the unique child gets an opportunity to give her or his own perspective in certain issues. At the same time, a child perspective can be presented by the adult trying to interpret the child’s experiences and feelings. In most research, the child’s own perspective as expressed from the child itself is rarely referred to. More often, it is mediated by the adult or the society (Halldén 2003). Andersson (2006) states that frequently, ‘child perspective’ derives from an adult perspective on children; that means, in the perspective of parents, or, at school environment, in the perspective of teachers and head-teachers.

From a more recent sociological perspective on childhood, children are viewed as active, rather than passive, agents, who create their own unique children’s cultures, while simultaneously contributing to the production of the adult society. Children participate in the social construction of childhood as well as in the society as a whole. As the nature of their contribution to society has changed, children have moved from being “useless to being useful” (Corsaro 2005). This perspective is in line with a *social constructive perspective* which emphasis that “children” and “childhood” are not facts of nature, but social constructions. With other words, children and childhood are interpreted and defined in process of social actions, rather than simply accepted as biological obvious social facts (Corsaro 2005; Woodhead & Montgomery 2003). More specific, children contribute to their

own childhood through the negotiation with adults and peers. Furthermore, children are always participating in and are part of two cultures, the children's and the adults', and these two cultures are intricately interlinked (Corsaro 2005). Not to forget, as Woodhead & Montgomery (2003) are stating, children's construction of their own world around notions of rights is possible when, and *only when*, such concepts are available to them.

4.1.2. Interpretive Reproduction

Instead of using the term socialisation, Corsaro (2005, p. 4) chooses the term *interpretive reproduction* which he refers as "the idea that children actively contribute to preservation (or reproduction) as well as society change". Compared to the term socialisation, which is often misinterpreted as merely a matter of adaption and internalisation, Corsaro emphasises that interpretive reproduction captures the innovative and creative aspects of children's participation in society. Children are not simply internalising society and culture; they are rather actively contributing to cultural production and change. In other words, children both affect and are affected by society. It also implies that children are, by their very participation in society, constrained by the existing social structures and societal reproduction.

Interpretive reproduction can be seen as a process of appropriation, reinvention and reproduction. Children strive to make sense of their culture and to participate in it and in the process; children become enable to be a part of adult culture. In all adult-child interactions, the most important is not that a shared understanding is always achieved. More important is that attempts to reach such understanding always are made by both adults and children (ibid.).

4.2. Pathways to Participation

As early as 1969, Sherry Arnstein introduced a ladder metaphor as a way of measuring adult participation. In the early 1990s, psychologist Roger A. Hart borrowed the 'ladder metaphor' and developed 'The Ladder of Participation' diagram, which is designed to serve as a beginning typology for thinking about children's participation in projects. Hart's ladder consists of eight levels, from manipulation to more genuine participation, and is described by Hart as models of participation in varying degrees of involvement and responsibility (Hart 1997).

Later on, Harry Shier (2001) developed the 'Pathways of Participation', built on Hart's model, as a new model for enhancing children's participation in decision-making in line with CRC article 12. Shier's model consists of five levels instead of eight, as he argues that the

three first levels in Harts diagram can be organised into one level, that will say, as non-participation. Shier advises that there is no intention with his model to replace Hart's diagram. It should rather be seen as an additional tool for practitioners, helping them to explore the complexity of the participation process and not in the assessment of child participation. The levels in 'Pathways of Participation' are following:

Level 1: Children are listened to

This level only requires that when children take it upon themselves to express a view, the views are listened to with proper attention by the responsible adult.

Level 2: Children are supported in expressing their views

This level requires that the adult take positive actions to encourage and enable children to express their views, which help children to overcome barriers that otherwise would prevent them to confidentially express themselves.

Level 3: Children's views are taken into account

At this level, the views of children are taken into account in *all* matters affecting the child, and, as stated in CRC article 12, are given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. That children must have a say, does not necessarily mean that they have to be given their way.

Level 4: Children are involved in decision-making processes

This level can be recognised as being the transition from child consultation to active participation. With other words, this level demonstrates genuine participation where children are directly involved in decision-making and not just strengthened and supported. However, they are still not allocated with any real power to the decisions that are made.

Level 5: Children share power and responsibility for decision-making

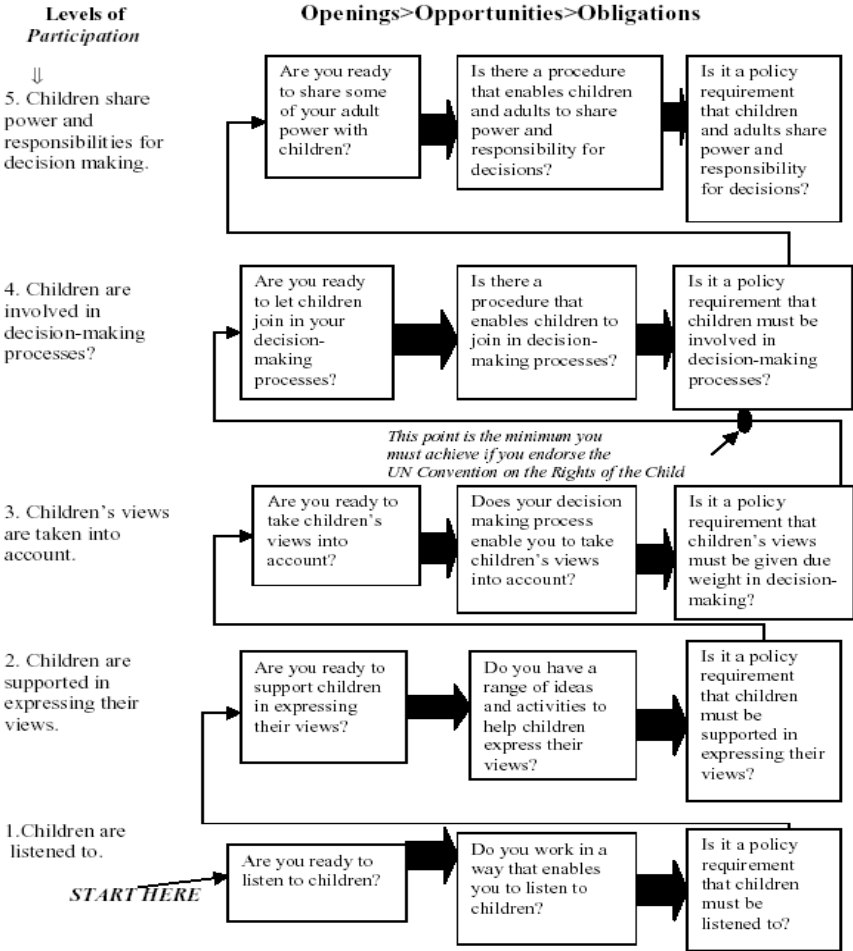
Level five requires an unambiguous commitment from adults to share their power with children, which means that a part of the adult authority over decision-making needs to be given away. In this way, children are empowered. Although sharing the power with adults, children do never have responsibility and should never be pressed to be a part of decisions they do not want.

Furthermore, Shier divides each of the five levels of participation into three different stages of commitment: opening, opportunity and obligation. The opening stage occurs as soon as the adult is ready to operate at the level indeed and intend to make personal commitment to work in a certain way to facilitate child participation. It is called opening as the opportunities to make it work might not be available. This moves us to opportunity, the next stage of

commitment, where the needs are available to make the work at the certain level possible. Examples of needs available are adequate resources (such as staff time); skills and competence inquired (for example entering training programmes) as well as the development of new processes. Finally, the obligation stage is established first when the adults' commitment has settled into an "agreed" policy of the whole organisation. At this point, the adults are obeyed to act in that certain way (ibid.).

'Pathways to Participation' identifies levels of participation through modes of interaction between adults and children. As a theory, we are thinking that the model will serve as a helpful instrument in our thesis in the analysis of student participation through the class and school councils. Hart (1997) states that 'the Ladder of Participation', as well as any other models of participation, should not be seen as a simple measuring stick of the quality of any programme, which we will have in our consideration. In fact, there are many factors affecting the extent to which children participate in any decision-making other than the design of a programme, for example the child's age and the complexity of cultural contexts (ibid.).

Shier's (2001) Pathways to Participation



5. Method

In the following chapter, we will present the methods that we used throughout our Minor Field Study. Initially, we will describe the access to the field, followed by the research process and the surroundings in which it took place. Furthermore, the selection of school and participants, the method of our choice as well as the analysis of the empirical material will be discussed. Finally, we will devote a last section to ethical considerations.

5.1. Access to the Field

As a part of our Minor Field Study, we spend eight weeks in Copperbelt Province, Zambia. At a starting point, it was through one of the lectures at Lund University, our tutor PhD Bodil Rasmusson, that we were introduced to the *The Child Rights, Classroom and School Management programme*, described in the introduction. After some consultation regarding our ambitions and requirements of doing a Minor Field Study, we were provided with contact details to the one of the teams' change agents participating in the programme of Zambia, all of them working at the Ministry of Education offices in Copperbelt Province. Initially, we established a good contact with one of the change agents, who accepted our request to be our tutor at the field. Through her, we had access to the high schools and the education system in Copperbelt Province as well as the class and school councils.

During our stay in Zambia we lived together with a Zambian family, our tutor at the field, which was a valuable experience to get an insight to the lifestyle and socio-cultural context of Copperbelt. The first week, we visited five of the nine provincial districts of Copperbelt Province. During this week, we had the opportunity to meet and exchange knowledge with important key persons within the Zambian education system at the Provincial Education Office, three of the Ministry of Education offices, the teachers training centre and some of the high schools. This provided us with general knowledge of the Zambian education system.

5.2. Selections

In our selection of a target school, we required to do our research at a public high school with both males and females. Before arrival, we did established contact with one of the public high schools in Copperbelt Province. We presented our Minor Field Study and our intention with doing a case study at the school targeted and got approval from the head-teacher of the school. Although, the communication was poor and after arrival, we were informed that it was no

longer possible to begin our study at this school for the first three weeks because of the national examinations within grade 12, which made us change our plans. Our tutor at field advised us to choose a high school in a district close to where we were located because of poor infrastructure and the upcoming rain season. We followed her advice and through the Deputy Education Board Secretary in the closest district, we were introduced to one of the leading public high schools concerning class and school councils. This high school became our target high school and at once, the school openly welcomed us. The school is located in an urban area and has some difficulties with poverty, substance abuse and poor infrastructure. The school is populated with approximately 1200 students, graded from 10-12, with students at the age of approximately 16 to 20. Throughout our research process, the head-teacher was really supportive and trustful. He gave us free space to the school activities as well as interacting with students, teachers and link-teachers.

In our selection of students for the focus group interviews (see below), we wanted the groups to be composed of equal females and males, representing all three grades and based on random selections on a voluntary basis. Because of the pressed schedule at the school with public exams and the fact that a lot of students were on leave, the head-teacher informed us that it would be difficult to choose the students without support. He suggested that support should be given by one of the link-teachers, the persons who are responsible for the organisation and operation of the class and school councils. We accepted his suggestion and made it clear to the link-teacher that it was important for our research that all participants were collected by a random selection and that their participation was based on a voluntary basis, representing students both in- and outside the school council. From our perspective, it seemed that the sample of students were randomly collected and represented the school well.

We did separate individual semi-structured interviews with both of the two link-teachers at the school and one of the grade-teachers. In the selection of the teacher, we went out to the teachers who were present at the school and requested of their availability to participate. The first teacher, who accepted our request, became our participant. Unfortunately, we were not able to arrange a time for a structured interview with the head-teacher, however, we had many good informal discussions with him, which provided us with valuable information.

5.3. Method of our choice

5.3.1. Case study

Firstly, as a part of our Minor Field Study, our choice of method was to do a case study. A case study is the study of the particularity and complexity in a single case and is considered to be well suited to answer how and why-questions that require a qualitative approach. Further, case studies offer a great opportunity of understanding a phenomenon. Meeuwisse et al. (2008) writes that the goal of case studies is to capture an investigated phenomenon in its context with all its complexity. It offers an opportunity to explain *why* some results can occur, more than just find out what those results are (Denscombe 2009).

In our choice of doing a case study at one target high school, we put into consideration the matter of time it would take for us to readjust to a culture and context that differs from ours. Our intention has never been to present a ‘complete picture’ of student participation through the class and school councils by doing one single case study. Anyhow, by focusing our attention at the class and school councils at one target high school for a period of time of six weeks, our goal has been to illuminate the general by looking into one individual case. In case studies, the use of several different data collection methods and different types of empirical data are preferable (Meeuwisse et al. 2008).

5.3.2. Observation

Observation was an important way of getting to know the school environment and the cultural context where our research took place. As a researcher, it is inevitable not to participate in social relationships. Tim May (2001) states that it is important that the researcher tries to understand the subject’s actions by putting oneself into the observed context, as people's actions and experiences derive their significance from the environment they live in. During a six week period, we attended the school approximately two to three times per week. We participated in different school activities, recognised as ‘participant observation’ which is about engaging in a social scene, experience it, try to understand it and explain it (ibid.). Furthermore, we did more systematic observations, for example, we attended and observed one school council meeting and one civic education lecture. As we are aware that it is likely that our presence at the school and during meetings may affect the natural environment and therefore, have an impact in the validity of the results of observation; our major method of collecting data was through creating focus groups and doing semi-structured interviews.

5.3.3. Focus Groups

Our primary way of collecting data was through semi-structured interviews by creating two focus groups; 1) Students who are representatives at the school council. 2) Students who are not representatives at the school council. Each focus group was combined of 5-8 students between the ages of 16 to 17. According to May (2001) it is important that the group does not consist of too few participants, as this restrains interaction studies. On the other hand, the group should not consist of too many participants as this restrains that all participants gets an opportunity to have a say in the discussions (ibid.).

Our intention with the focus group interviews was to create open discussions by initiating each meeting with different themes, for example ‘class and school councils’, ‘student participation’, ‘the concept and role of the child’ and ‘the rights of the child’ etcetera. Particularly, we had the hierarchical structure within the Zambian school system in our mind when we chose the method of creating focus group meetings, as we had some assumptions that the students would feel unfamiliar with our presence and have difficulties to speak out. The strength with interviewing people in groups is that the participants may feel more relaxed in expressing their experience and views. Further, by interaction, each individual will contribute with new perspectives, creating new thoughts and alternative opinions to the other participants. As we spend most of our lives with others, it is hardly surprising that our actions and opinions may be modified depending on the social situation we are in (May 2001). This was noticeable at all our focus group meetings and the discussions held were very lively. Every student participated actively and according to us, they seemed to be very free in their expressions. They encouraged as well as interrupted each other, either to build on the argument proposed by peers, or, to argue against it. In this way, group interviews, such as focus group meetings, provided us with valuable insights into both the social relations in general and social process dynamics in particular (ibid.). The fact that we are two female students from a western society, studying at a University level was certainly affecting the focus group meetings. Based on this background, we assumed that the students would be restrained and less candid. Therefore, the students’ openness and free discussion surprised us. Still, it is inevitable that the circumstances had an impact on and may affect the students to give us the answer they thought we expected.

Altogether, we did four focus group interviews, two with the school council representatives and two with students not represented in the school council. In both of the interviews with the

school council representatives, one of us was acting as a moderator who followed up the group discussions by asking open questions to the participants. Example of questions were to describe the student and teacher relationship, the attitudes towards the class and school councils amongst the students, teachers and school administration, as well as the challenges and benefits with class and school councils. The other one of us was responsible of tape-recording and taking down notes of the meeting. We shifted position at the focus groups meetings with the students outside the school council, with the aim to eliminate any confusion of our roles among the students.

The first meeting with each of the groups was an ‘introduction meeting’ for approximately one hour, where the questions were focused on how the class and school councils are organised and operating in relation to student participation. Introductory questions can provide the moderator with an idea of the participants and their views on the topics, and for us it served as a good preparation for the following meeting (Krueger and Casey 2009). At the second meeting, lasting for two-three hours, we were paying more attention to in-depth and cultural-related questions concerning the students’ perspectives, understandings and experiences of student participation through the class and school councils. Krueger and Casey call this kind of questions for transition questions, as they move the conversation into the key questions. The key questions intend to capture the main purpose of the study and are most important in the following analysis. We mainly used open-ended questions, where a few words or a phrase is insufficient as an answer. To further engage the students, we used tools such as mind-mapping and imagination games (see appendix 1).

5.3.4. Individual Semi-structured Interviews

The strength with using semi-structured interviews is that they pursue in-depth information (Denscombe 2009). Altogether, we did three individual semi-structured interviews with the two link-teachers and one of the grade-teachers at our target school. Each of the interviews lasted for approximately one hour and the questions that we asked were similar to the questions we used in our focus groups (see appendix 2). All of the interviews were tape-recorded. Our intention with using semi-structured interviews as method was to get a wider perspective on student participation through the class and school councils, by collecting in-depth information from the perspective of teachers and link-teachers. We believed that their perspectives have a major impact on the organisation and operation of student participation. Further, it helped us in our analysis to describe a more ‘complete’ picture of student

participation at our target school. The validity with interviewing only one of the teachers can be questioned, but because of the time-limits and the pressed schedule at the school, we found that this was our only possibility. We are well aware that we cannot draw up a complete picture of teachers' perceptions of student participation.

5.4. Analysing the empirical material

The empirical material that have been used in our analysis were, as mentioned above, collected through the two observations, four focus group interviews, three individual semi-structured interviews as well as open conversations with the head-teacher. All of our interviews were tape-recorded and carefully transcribed during our stay in Zambia. In the process of analysing the empirical material, we coded the material by dividing it into main topics related to our purpose of the study and the questions of issue. Those became our headlines in the presentation of our result.

5.5. Ethical Considerations

To ensure that the participants were treated ethically with respect for their integrity, we followed the four principles: 1. information, 2. consent, 3. confidentiality, 4. use (Vetenskapsrådet 2002).

Initially, at the introduction meeting at our target high school, we tried to ensure that we supplied the school and the participants with clear information about the purpose of our study and the methods of our choice. We handed out a cover letter to the head-teacher, and introduced ourselves to the school administration, the link-teachers, the teachers and the students (see appendix 4). In the selection process of students and a teacher, the informants were provided with a brief introduction by us on the purpose of the study.

Furthermore, we wanted to ensure to have consent from all the participants in our case study. Additionally, we needed to be sure of the current Zambian rules regarding interviewing children, as all the students in our focus groups were under the age of 18 years. After a consultation with the Ministry of Education office, we got the information that parental consent was not necessary in accordance with Zambian law. At our initial meeting with all participants, they were all informed that their participation was based on voluntary participation and that everyone was free to interrupt their participation at any time during the research process. We also ensured that all participants, both children and adults, were treated ethically correct with respect for their integrity and with confidentiality during the research

process. Tim May (2001) states that interviews are social interactions and not just a passive way of gathering information. Therefore, we found it important that the participants were not just seen as informants, but as contributors and peers. We openly declared our expectations and informed that they were free to interrupt and ask us questions at any time.

Concerning ethical consideration in relation to the use of data, after transcribing the conversations, the tape-recorded data were erased and have only been used for the purpose of the study. In the analysis of the empirical data, all the names of the participants as well as the name and district of the high school have been removed. In the following result chapter, both of the link-teachers will be referred as “she” whilst the teacher will be referred as “he”, unrelated of their actual biological sex.

In interviews with children and young people, there are additional ethical considerations to take into account. For example; how the interview questions may impact on the child or young person, and how to protect the child's or the young person's privacy and anonymity etcetera. Corsaro (2005) states that more than often we are taking children's perspective for granted and our own views as the truth. We took this into additional consideration when creating open focus groups questions, as well as during the meetings. From a socio-cultural perspective, we tried to use the words that the students normally use when talking about the issues and to ensure that the words we used were one-dimensional. When questions are asked, participants should easily understand what you are asking (Krueger & Casey 2009).

6. Results

The accomplishment of the case study at our target school went beyond our expectation. The overall experiences presented by the participants were very positive and all participants indicated of a very positive change since the establishment of the class and school councils. At the same time, they seemed to be well aware of the challenges with the increased student participation and invited us to open discussions on how to move forward. This is the results presented by us, representing the empirical material expressed by the participants together with the analysis of ours.

6.1. The Concept of the Child

Before describing and analysing student participation through the class and school councils, we want to clarify the concept of a child from the socio-cultural context where our research took place, as the students who participated were under the age of 18. Initially, we asked all participants about their interpretation of the concept of the child. They expressed different opinions and the conversations concerning the concept of a child were dynamic and lively.

6.1.1. Who is a Child?

In relation to the age of a child in Zambia, many students argued that “a child in Zambia is someone below the age of 16”. As an example, they mentioned that “when you reach 16, you are entitled the IRC”, the international registration card. Other students argued that you are a child until the age of 18 and referred to international treaties, such as CRC. This was in line with the arguments from one of the link-teachers who stated that “Zambia, as a nation decided to put it at 16, but internationally, they make us as a child below the age of 18”. The same thoughts can be recognised in the arguments of Ncube (1998) and Lansdown (2001) as they stress that even though the majority of the African countries have ratified the CRC and relies on the conception of the child as someone below the age of 18, more commonly, the specific age of the child is not important to decide who is a child or not. Another argument presented by the students was linked to the eligibility of having a vote and being a part of the elections at the age of 18. According to the teacher, he considered a child as someone between the ages of 1 to 15 and “at the age of 17, they are definitely seen as adults” which comply to the arguments of Stern (2006) that in many regions and cultures other than in the West, young people are often regarded as being adults much earlier than the age of 18. Furthermore, when we asked the students if they were adults or children, they replied that: “We are not children, but, somehow we are children because we are still at school. Internationally we are children, but here in Zambia they will say that we are adults”. In relation to this, one student pointed out that the age factor is not sufficient in itself to describe a child:

For me, according to my own understanding, age does not decide which one who is a child. I think it is in the way a person behaves. It is the attitude which shows if that person is able to stand up and say what is wrong and right, and that person is an adult, because he or she is responsible. If I can stop myself from, let's say, from doing like a child is supposed to do, like playing in the mud, than I am not like a child.

The students further explained that the school is consisted of students from a wide range of ages and because of this, the school council and the child rights club are not restricted to any age limits. Instead, the students agreed that every student, even if they are 16 or 21 and still at school, are to be seen as children.

6.1.2. What is a Child?

Childhood is a social construction and is given different cultural meanings in different contexts (Ncube 1998; Stern 2006). The way in which we perceive a child is a reflection of how society perceives both children in general as well as the particular child (Stern 2006). When we asked the participants to describe a child with their own words, in short, everyone in our research agreed that a child is someone who is “dependent on his or her parents”. Further, a child was described as someone “who needs to be taken care of”. The same arguments are found in a more traditional perspective on children, where the child is perceived as someone who is younger, smaller, more immature and more vulnerable than adult human beings (Woodhead & Montgomery 2003). The child is seen as irrational *per se* and therefore dependent on parents and other adults to care for them (Stern 2006). As the teacher stated:

From my point of view it means that, when you are a child, you are considered to be under someone; you cannot do things by yourself; you need to be guided and to be cared for. Parents need to come in and be responsible for their children, to give them the right education and all their support they need, because, children cannot develop on their own. They need to be given education from their parents. You even have to teach them about your culture, the way they are supposed to behave, and this is very important. This is my own understanding.

One of the link-teachers argued in the same line:

To be a child, according to my own words, means that you are someone economical dependent. You are seeking for advices and guidelines and it means that you have to work extra hard in order to reach the goals, which an adult person should reach. Childhood is a preparation for life.

In the end of this quotation, the link-teacher defined a child primarily by what they are going to be and not what they presently are. According to Corsaro (2005) this is one of the characteristics of traditional societies where childhood is merely seen as a preparation into adulthood, without a value in itself.

From the students own perspective, being a child means that even if a child is independent in many ways, they are still relying on their parents. They defined a child as “someone who is not fully mature in his thinking capacity”. The difference between an adult person and a child

was described as a difference in a mature level; “As an adult, you have a deep sense of responsibility and are able to take care of yourself”. While the immaturity of children is a biological fact, the way in which that immaturity is understood and made meaningful, is a fact of culture (Ncube 1998; Woodhead & Montgomery 2003). The arguments presenting in this section is in line with a *social constructive perspective* which emphasis that “children” and “childhood” are not facts of nature, but social constructions (Corsaro 2005). Furthermore, as you can see in the arguments above, the cultural meaning within one and the same context differs, depending on diversity of perspectives and opinions of the persons living in that context.

6.1.3. The Relationship between Children and Adults

The students described that the relationship between children and adults are generally very good. According to the Zambian culture, they stated that “children are supposed to respect adults” and adults are “...the ones who take care of children”. The students explained that traditionally, in the culture of Zambia, children are expected to keep quiet unless authorised by elders. They gave an example that if a child at home were wrongly being abused, it did not matter if they got the proof that they were wrongly abused. The child was expected to keep quiet until the adult person admitted that what he did was wrong and there was no idea to discuss the relationship. Similar arguments have been revealed by Ncube (1998) and Porter et al (2010), as they described the African cultural context of childhood, where children are often being perceived in lower position hierarchies than adults and socialised to always respect elders. However, the participants in our research stated that nowadays the relationship has changed. Further they argued that children are entitled to tell an adult person that he or she does not agree or does not like what has been said or done by the adult. This is more in line with recent sociological perspective on childhood where children are viewed as active, rather than passive, actors (Corsaro 2005). Looking to the rights that children in Zambia have today, the students declared that there is a best interest principal of children and child participation;

While our adult is maybe talking about a child subject with a child, the child is allowed to have an opinion. This is some of the things that we discuss at the student council, so that a lot of children have the knowledge of children. It allows children to participate.

As the nature of the child’s contribution to society starts to change, children are moving from being useless to being useful (Corsaro 2005). From the teacher’s point of view, the

relationship between adults and children depends on “the type of family that they come from”. He explained that in Zambia there are traditions to follow and children may “be a bit reserved and not as free with their parents”. He added that recently, Zambia has begun to “copy Western-culture”. Children’s are acting more free with their parents and “they even participate in decision-making at home”.

6.2. Organisation of Class and School Councils

6.2.1. Establishment

As a starting point of student participation, in 2007, the subject of civic education was offered at our target school and the awareness among teachers concerning child rights grew stronger. Civic education is a social science subject including relevant topics such as country governance, democracy and human rights, citizens’ participation, drug abuse and sexually transmitted diseases. Recently, civic education is a compulsory subject at our target school. Through the introduction of civic education at schools, the importance of citizens’ participation in governance was illuminated, the link-teachers stated.

The same year, class and school councils were introduced in Copperbelt Province as a project at three pilot high schools through the earlier mentioned international training programme. After the programme was conducted, a formal decision was taken that all high schools in Copperbelt province should have school councils and in the beginning of 2008, class and school councils were established at our target school. In fact, our target school was one of the first schools in Copperbelt Province to introduce class and school councils and was chosen to be a pilot school in the located district, we were informed. At the beginning, two link-teachers were chosen at the school and sent to a workshop in Lusaka, hold by the Zambian Civic Education Association. They were sensitised on the rights of the child and the organisation and operation of class and school councils. Back at the school, the school administration, including the link-teachers, organised a one-day-workshop for the teachers. The purpose of the workshop was to inform the teachers with child rights and student participation. As one of the link-teachers stated:

You cannot just bring class and school councils to start to exist without the knowledge of the teachers... Like, what is their role in the school council, because, the school council is not only for the students. Even the teachers are involved, which means that the teachers must be concerned.

Ncube (1998) argues in the same line, that the knowledge of the rights of the child needs to be encouraged at all levels at schools, not at least amongst the teachers. As teachers and students increases their awareness of the rights of the child, together with gaining social mobilisation strategies, rapid changes can be made (Rasmusson 2011). In relation to Harry Shier's (2001) 'Pathways to Participation' model, introducing teachers to the concept of class and school council can be recognised as the opening stage of commitment. The opening stage occurs as soon as the adult is ready to operate at the level indeed and intend to make personal commitment to work in a certain way to facilitate child participation (ibid.). We were told that the workshop was successful and teachers learned how to support the class and school councils.

6.2.2. Organisation

At our target school, the class and school councils are organised in the way that "every student is a part of it", expressed by students. The class council was described by the teacher as "a council which is combined with students in a specific class". Every class forms its own class council with its own chair person and secretary, one male and one female. These two class representatives, as they are called, are elected in each class by each and every student in democratic means. In the election process, which is held once a year as new students are entering the school, every student is provided with a pen and paper by the grade-teacher to write down the name of the person they want to be their class representatives. The winner becomes the chairperson and the one who gets the second most votes becomes the secretary. Further, the two class representatives from each class form the school council. This means that every class and grade from 10-12 is represented within the school council. In total, the school council at our target school consists of 64 class representatives, more often called 'school council representatives'. The school council has its own chair person, vice chair person, secretary, vice secretary and other executive members who found 'the committee', altogether 13. As well as with the class council representatives, the executive members within the school council are democratic and secretly elected by every student. The way it works is that the school council representatives are running a one-day campaign each year where they present themselves in every class and the following day an election is held. One by one the students in the classes choose the one they feel "is able to represent the school", expressed by some students as "the one who is free, intelligent and can do things". The school seems to take a democratic responsibility, which can only be reached through practice and involvement

as Matthews and Limb (1999) stresses. It does not suddenly arise as the child enters into adulthood, without involving children from the beginning to become competent and participating citizens (ibid.).

6.2.3. Order of the Meetings

From our interviews and focus groups meetings, we were provided with different information regarding the duration of the meetings. According to the school council representatives, the class and school council meetings are held three times per term, in other words, once per month. The students outside the school council advised that class and school councils “should be held” twice per term. Meanwhile, the teacher stated that the class and school councils meetings “must be held at least once per term” and added that students are permitted to have meetings more regularly. Unfortunately, this often fails because of pressed school program.

A typical class council meeting goes for approximately 45 minutes to one hour depending on the topics discussed. Normally, the meetings are held during school hours immediately after a break, usually on Wednesdays. However, the class and school councils meetings are not scheduled, which is unfortunate as children are having few possibilities to make their voices heard in school settings and demand that they are listened to (Stern 2006). The students in our focus groups informed that during the class council meetings, the class representatives ask which topics they want to discuss and commonly, important issues concerning the class are brought up to discussion. For example, if the class feels that some changes are needed or recognise some problems concerning the school. The chairperson is in charge of the class council meeting; he or she is responsible to prepare, open and present the agenda of the day. He or she is also responsible of making sure that the issues brought up by the class are handled one by one. He or she has to ensure that all students are given the chance to express their views and are involved in the discussions. According to Flutter (2006), a common difficulty with increasing student participation through class and school councils is to ensure that the views from the majority of students are fairly represented, and, not mainly expressed by the executive students, such as class and school council representatives. Sometimes, the class representatives receive an agenda from the school council that are to be taken to the class council meeting, but most of the time it is the class itself who decides the topics that are going to be discussed. The secretary is responsible of taking down the notes. The grade-teacher is normally present during the class council meetings as promoted by the head of the school, although, it is the classes who decide whether or not the teacher should be present.

This contradicts the traditional approach of students in Africa as presented by Siamwiza (1989) and Thelander (2009) where teachers and school administration are perceiving students as one who should be told what to do, because he or she is too immature to make decisions. As some students mentioned, some topics can be hard if not “impossible” to discuss in presence of teachers. Both the school council representatives and the teacher agreed that it is not teachers who are to be in charge of the meetings.

After every class council meeting has been held, the 64 class representatives meet in the school hall as the school council to speak on behalf of their classes, commonly on Fridays. The role of the school council meetings is for the representatives to report what they have been discussing in their class. One by one, they will represent the problems that their classes are facing and the achievements they want to be made. The duration of the school council meetings is depending on the discussions held in the classes and the agenda of the day as “some topics are very wide”. The chairperson is responsible for holding and organising the meeting and making sure that every member of the school council is collaborating and working together as a team. The secretary is responsible for taking down the notes and preparing the agenda together with the chairperson. Before the school council meeting is held, it is important that all the class representatives are disclosing what their class has discussed to the secretary, so that he or she is able to pick up the main topics to discuss within the school council. The secretary is also responsible for publishing the discussions being held and the decisions that are made at all meetings to provide every student of the school with inside information of the school council meetings. The school council committee of executive members normally meet the following Monday after the school council meeting. The committee is the one to meet the head of the school to report what have been discussed and the changes students want to be made. Further, the committee are responsible to bring up issues that the students are facing as they arouse in school. In collaboration with the head, they have to come up with a solution and decide “how the school should be run”. This is in line with recent childhood sociology and Corsaro’s’ (2005) concept ‘interpretive reproduction’ which captures the innovative and creative aspect of students’ participation in society. Students are not simply internalising the culture of school; they are rather actively contributing to the development and changes of school (ibid.). To summarise, when students are facing a problem, they consult with their class representatives and the class representatives take it to the committee, who brings it out to the head of the school. This is how one of the students explained the process:

If I see that something bad is going on at the school, I will take that problem to the class representatives. Instead of going to the head-teacher with all these problems, we are supposed to go to the class representatives and then they will take it to the head-teacher. The class representatives take it to the committee who takes it to the head, and then they take it back to the class.

This means that the committee are having the closest communication with the school administration. However, after every school council meeting and the meetings with the head-teacher, the class representatives are responsible to bring back the information to the class and give the students feedback on the decisions that are made to make sure every student is included. Still, every student has the possibility to go to the grade-teacher directly, instead of to the representatives, to bring up issues, ask for advices or report complaints. They do not have to keep quiet until the next meeting is held, as the students stated.

6.2.4. Roles

According to article 12, child participation requires that adults are creating opportunities for children to express their feelings in a way appropriate to their abilities and interest. It also means that the adults are guiding and supporting children's participation in a constructive manner and not merely focus on whether or not they are competent to participate (Stern 2006). The role of the teacher during the class council meetings, according to himself, is not to advise the students but to encourage them to participate actively. As he proclaimed:

When I am there, I am not going to assist them. I need to encourage them and the students need to speak out on what they think is right for them. When I am there and the students have decided to criticise a teacher, I am not there to prevent it. So, my role as a teacher is to encourage them, not to despise them.

During the class council meetings, the whole class is expected to contribute. The link-teachers are responsible to subsidise those students who are new to the system, as the grade 10s, of the rights of the child and the aim of the class and school councils. They are not "used to the fact that students can participate in important school matters" as the link-teachers explained. This is recognised in traditional societies, as argued by Corsaro (2005), where children are being regarded as objects in need of as protection and not as individuals with rights equal to the rights of adults.

The role of the class representatives is to "bring out issues which will benefit students and as a result, every student will participate". Some students expressed that "the people who are voted

to be the executive class representatives should be leading examples of participation amongst the pupils”. What this also means is that the role of the chair person and the secretary is not to be “prefects, nor monitors”. They are just acting on behalf of the class as “free persons”, explained by the link-teachers. Although, as the teacher pointed out, they “have to choose students who are ready to give views, who like to participate and want to raise their voices on things they feel is not right. And in fact, they really speak out”. The teacher informed that even during lessons, students are encouraged to participate and take part. They are not expected “just to be listening, they also need to participate”. This contradicts the underlying assumption in many undeveloped societies that the child should “be seen and not heard” as well as the results presented by Siamwiza (1989) that in overcrowded classrooms in the schools in Zambia, children hardly have time to discuss important matters with their teachers.

The teachers are not involved in the school council meetings. Most of the time, the link-teachers are present and at times they are even attending the class council meetings. According to the teacher, the role of the link-teacher is to organise the class and school councils meetings and make sure that the meetings are held at the right time. The school council representatives explained that “the link-teacher is just there to observe the meeting and is not allowed to participate in the discussions, to put out comments or to give orders”. Even this argument contradicts the traditional view of children and their rights as well as the relationship between children and adults. From another point of view, the school council representatives explained that as a council “it is difficult to control other pupils so we need like an outside person who can assist and encourage us”. This is in line with the arguments of Stern (2006), that increased participation does not remove the responsibility from adults to ensure that the child’s best interest is perceived in all matters affecting the child. The students added; “In our culture we are taught very much to respect elders, but sometimes we fear them”. This can be seen as a way of more subtitle power, as Stern (2006) points out, which are power values upon most of us. They added that is why it is “good to have the support from the link-teachers to assist us in our communication with adults at the school”. According to the teacher, the link-teachers can be seen as “the facilitators” who arrange the appointments for the committee to meet with the head and presenting them with their important matters. The link-teachers have to make sure that the council is supported and not left alone, connect the students with the administration and working as a bridging-gap. The school council representatives declared:

In short, the link-teacher is a mix between the council and the school administration...”She” is like a platform, whatever problem we have, we will go to “her” and tell “her”. If we have got a problem amongst our self as a council “she” will come, because sometimes it is difficult as a council. “She” is like our chairperson.

The link-teachers agreed in the above mentioned description; that the school council is free to advise them at any time and they are not there to put themselves over the students. Further, the link-teachers stated that they are striving to create freely discussions and decision-making with students involved. They added; “even as we try, we do not always have the possibility to attend the meetings”. When the link-teacher schedule is tied up, the school administration takes the responsibility to remind students of the importance of the meetings so that the activities within the school council take place. Commonly during the meetings, they provide students with refreshments.

6.3. Experiences of Student Participation

All participants expressed themselves in very positive terms to the recently introduced concept of student participation and the establishment of class and school councils. They were happy to share the many positive changes that are and have been taken place. At the same time, they revealed the challenges with introducing student participation through class and school councils as well as their prospect plans to develop the concept, the organisation and the operation to the future. For example, student participation was not described as being fully equal. According to some students there are “always those students who think that they are the most talent and therefore, they also reason that they have the most important opinion”. The school council representatives further explained that there are other students who feel that they are not able to contribute with their own views and therefore, they do not participate. “So student participation is not 50/50, it is rather 75/25”. However, the importance of the class and school councils for the development and implementation of the rights of the child and reaching the goal of a more democratic setting could not be dismissed. These are the words of one of the link-teachers:

I think you should know that this activity, apart from student participation, transpiration and our duty of citizens, all citizens should be able to take part in national issues. Because in the future, the students will be involved in a number of activities. Some will be involved in non-governmental organisations and others in the ruling of the country. As a teacher, I think they will be proud when they realise that this student went through my hands. We started it from this school, from the backgrounds and roots up to the top. It is a great achievement if we manage to run this council.

The quotation captures the innovative aspects of socialisation that is recognised in Corsaro's (2005) term *interpretive reproduction* with “the idea that children actively contribute to preservation (or reproduction) as well as society change”.

6.3.1. The Meaning of the Concept Student Participation

The class and school councils are given the students a platform to “air their views”. This was expressed by the students, both in- and outside the school council as well as the teacher. Through the class and school councils “everybody is free to express themselves and it helps students to participate in important school matters” as expressed by the students. The class and school councils enable students to



make suggestions on how to develop the school to be a better school. This can be linked to Shier's (2001) opportunity stage of commitment, level two, where children are actually being supported in expressing their views. For the students outside the school council, student participation means that all students are able to participate and being well aware of what the school is facing. It also means that students are able to share their opinions and problems with the school council, to bring the issues to the head. This is recognised at the third level by Shier, where children are not just listened to, but their views are even taken into account. This was how one student expressed his personal view of student participation through the class and school councils:

For me, it means that we students are given the chance to speak out on what is right and take part in the development in the school. And for the school council, it means that we are contributing in the development of school and it gives us a chance to do that as well. Personally, the student council has helped me in student participation. Every time in the class council, we have the chance to participate and we have the chance to go to the class representatives to tell them what we think is right. So, we are contributing in the school.

Another student added;

It means everything such as freedom of expression, freedom of speech and freedom of student in general, and, I really think we all benefit from it. Especially for those who are not given the chance to speak out and say what they want at home.

The school council representatives agreed and added that the meaning of student participation differs amongst students who “come from different homes”. They explained that the way you are treated at home will affect the way you appear at school. Even if student participation can be problematic in practice “it is a good thing that is becoming Zambian”. The arguments above opposes the common objection in relation to child participation that it fails to include certain groups of children, those who are already being disadvantaged (Thomas 2007). Even the link-teacher pointed out that student participation means a lot for the students. From her own words, she explained that education has the role in “transforming the young ones and prepare them with necessary knowledge for social life”.

If we are denying children’s opportunities to participate in governance, it means that we are closing the door for a future of autonomy peoples. That is why it is better for children to really know how to participate and learn how to take part in national issues, so that they grow up with that in mind.

As you can see, she perceives students in a more forward-looking way, in what the students will become, which is a still common perception even in today’s societies (Corsaro 2005). From the student’s perspective, since the introduction of the class and school councils, the teaching methods have increased. It has also “forced teachers to become more punctual and effective” as the students have got the possibility to report teachers to the school administration if they are not satisfied. For the teacher himself, student participation through the class and school councils means that when student participate they “build us and encourage us as teacher”. In other words, it means that children both affect and are affected by society which is recognised in childhood sociology theory. Furthermore, the teacher stated that for teachers in general there is two ways of looking at student participation. Some teachers, “those who understand it”, think that it is really good for the students and “those are mainly teachers in social sciences”. This was agreed by the students. Other teachers are looking at human rights more critical and with a negative mind as they think that it makes students become “more stupid and indiscipline”. This can be understood by looking to the arguments of Stern (2006) stating that the combination of “children” and “power” challenges

the social order where children by definition are subordinate to adults in the hierarchy of power, influence and status.

From another perspective, according to the students and the link-teachers, student participation through the class and school councils means that teachers are given a chance to be aware of students' thoughts and opinions regarding the school which enhance the encouragement of student participation by teachers. For the link-teacher herself, student participation through the class and school councils means that students interact in discussions and that adults at school are no longer entitled to order students on how or what to discuss. Instead, they are there to listen to the voices of students which can be recognised in the opening stage of Shier's fourth level, where the adults are ready to let students be a part of decision-making processes. As Montgomery (2003) are stating, children's construction of their own world around notions of rights is possible when, and *only when*, such concepts are available to them.

In addition to this, we asked all participants to illustrate what they think that student participation through the class and school council means for the school administration. Everyone agreed that it means "a lot for the administration" and that all levels at the school are benefitting of the changed structure. They gave an example that nowadays, the administration can make sure that the students are a part of the school by letting them contribute in different matters. Through the class and school councils, the administration becomes aware of the problems that the students are facing. As students speak out on what is needed at the school, such as new school materials, cleaner toilets, better infrastructure etcetera, first then and only then, changes can be made with the help of administration. The class and school councils seem to give students the opportunity to be a part of different decision-making at school which moves student participation to the opportunity stage of commitment at the fourth level of Shier's (2001) model. In this sentence, one of the students explained that there used to be a lot of abuse at the school but through speaking out the problem to the administration they were able to reduce the abuse. Another issue of importance, from a longer term perspective on the development of the school, was declared by one of the students:

We students are not going to stay here forever. For us, it is just a couple of years and then we are off. So, they are also benefitting because the school itself will change and that will attract new students.

With the establishment of the class and school councils, a part of the administration's responsibility has been shared with the school council representatives. For example, if a student is misbehaving during school hours, the school council representatives have the authority to reprimand the student in question. Also, since the introduction of the class and school councils, the school administration has found that their students are doing very well. As a result, they win many prizes and the glory goes back to the school. The argument above stresses that student participation are improving the physical environment in schools. As Flutter (2006) declared, school environment is emerged as one of the most important factors affecting the quality of student's learning in school. It may not seem strange that the administration seems to appreciate the class and school councils. As a conclusion, it seems that student participation through the class and school councils are important for the school as a whole and that the students, even those outside the school council, play an important role in the running. As the students stated, "without student participation, the school council cannot be run".

6.3.2. Knowledge and Acceptance

In relation to student participation and the way that it is conducted, first of all it is important that all members of the school are included, are being well aware of their rights and knowing how they can participate. As argued in the chapter of previous research, there is a risk that the class and school councils make democracy to a decoration without any further meanings and reasons (Alderson 2000; Allan & I 'Anson 2004; Morrow 1999). Our research showed that even the students outside the school council knew about the topics discussed at the school council meetings. They gave us different examples of the school council's discussions; the relationship between students and teachers, student performance, issues with school uniforms and the learning environment at the school surrounding. As Sinclair & Franklin (2009) stresses, student participation means that children are given adequate information that is relevant to them.

Every staff at the school is obligated to work in favour for student participation through the class and school councils. The concept has become an established policy at our target school which moves us to Shier's (2001) obligation stage of commitment regarding student participation. The practical way that student participation through the class and school councils is operated at our target school is that when decisions are to be made during a class or school council meeting, the representatives organise a vote and "whatever the majority

says, is the way it goes”. In this way, students will learn both how to argue for what they believe in and how to handle a defeat in a vote, expressed by the students expressed. This is totally in line with the arguments of Rubenson (1999) which will generate in the establishment of a democratic culture. Furthermore, through the class and school councils, the students are trained to “identify themselves”. As Flutter (2006) argues, class and school councils help students develop creative life skills such as team-working, problem-solving, communication, negotiation and citizenship, which alter in good confidence and self-belief. The school council representatives explained that first of all, students have to learn that “rights come with responsibilities” which can be linked to the general held idea concerning children’s participation that participation is beneficial for children in their process towards becoming responsible, autonomous adults. Through participation, children learn the rules and processes of democracy (Stern 2006). For example, some students may bring out an irrelevant point “that this needs to be done” without thinking of the consequences. As the school council “we need to consult with the head if the suggestions are possible and in line with the rights of the child to make an approval”. This argument is recognised in CRC article 12 and demonstrates that increased participation does not remove all the authority from adults. Adults are still possessed with the authority to have a final say in matters related to the child (ibid.).

To conclude, many research studies as mentioned in previous chapters have shown that initiating class and school councils is not enough to involve children in decision-making processes. Other deeper structural and relational changes in the culture and organisation of the school are required (Alderson 2000). However, the result from our research demonstrates that since the establishment of class and school councils at our target school, all participants agreed that student participation has increased. Perhaps, the reason is the establishment of other activities at our target school that are promoting student participation and helping all students to express themselves, such as, panel discussions and different debate clubs where certain issues are brought up to discussions and everyone is free to participate. The link-teacher informed that “a good number of students from different schools come for these events and want to participate”. There is also a suggestion-box at the school where students can leave anonymous complaints or suggestions, but Flutter’s (2006) research has shown that even though a suggestion-box increases students’ possibilities to have a say in important matters, students need to be involved into proper discussions to make valid contribution. At our target school, the suggestion box seemed to be working as a good complement to the class and school councils. Furthermore, there is a ‘Child Right’s Club’ where human rights as a

whole, and child right in particular, are discussed. It is a non-governmental organisation but in contradiction to the class and school councils, the head of the school is not obliged to the founding of the Child Right's Club. There are also different sport activities for students to participate in which "advantages students' responsibility and feeling of belonging" as the link-teacher indicated. Furthermore, there is a social science fare for teachers to promote the social science subjects and different work-shops. Some of them are in collaboration with Zambian Civic Education Association, to subsidise students and teachers and promote students publications such as the Child Rights Paper.

6.3.3. Decision-making

Previous research shows that when it comes to children's participation in decision-making, children are often regarded as semi-citizens who are not entrusted with the power to exercise influence, regardless of the benefits this might have for the individual child and the society as a whole (Stern 2006). Therefore, we were amazed when the students expressed that they were involved in most decision-making at the school. This can be referred to as empowerment, which means that the students are becoming someone who can exercise influence and are in control of one's own situation and are going from being an "object" to "agent". As a consequence, the teachers need to "rethink" how to share their power with students (Sinclair & Franklin 2000) which is in line with CRC article 12. The teacher claimed that the purpose of the class and school councils is;

...to make the students articulate their views and also, to participate in decision-making at all school levels. And to insure that they are heard in the running of the school and are helping the administration, because some of the ideas that they bring out are there to built the school. At times, you will find that the administrators and teachers are not even aware of the issues, but when the students bring them out, they are happy about the decisions.

The teachers and link-teachers are obliged to involve students in most decision-making. As students are becoming more involved, it changes the power structure from a top-down to a bottom-up perspective (Habashi et al. 2010). The students themselves explained that they were a part of every decision-making concerning the school itself, except the things only considering teachers. In fact, most of the things discussed at the school concern the students and if the students are connected to the issues in any way, they are always allowed to participate. This was how one of the school council representatives explained the decision-making process;

When the school has a meeting to decide what the budget will be for the next year, they will listen to us on what we want to improve at the school. We are participating as speakers from the class council, which means that we are speaking on behalf of the class. What they have expressed at the class council meetings, we will raise later with the head. When we meet with the head, we always speak about the things that are affecting the students, because if the students have got problems, it means that the administration will rely that we will bring it out.

The quotation demonstrates that the students are participating in the school-budget making and as one student declared; “by participating in the school budget, we are also participating in the national budget as the school budget is a part of the national economy and is an important step before we are actually mature”. This is in line with childhood sociology theory which stresses that students’ participation and negotiation with adults and peers are contributing to the society as a whole, as well as their own childhood (Corsaro 2005). Even the students outside the school council felt that they were directly involved in the budget-making-process, mainly through elections where the students are asked to vote; “the head will ask what we want to be included in the budget and we students are free to be a part of it”. It contradicts the results presented by Sinclair (2004) that children’s involvement in decision-making processes in society has rather been seen as a part of their learning-process, to become responsible citizens for the future, in contradiction to let the child’s views be worthy of proper consideration.

There are many other examples of practical improvements at our target school made through student participation in decision-making. Examples of such improvements given were regarding the schools water system, the toilets, the electricity and infrastructures as well as getting new furniture’s and a school run tuck-shop. The students even got their suggestion of a new library approved by the school administration and the renovation is going to take place in the year of 2011. This is one of the students story on how they were a part of the decision-making process concerning the library;

Before we had a library outside the school and what used to be happening is that you had to go a long way to find the books you needed. We told them that we could need a library here to read, so maybe, next year they will start.

Another good example described several times by the students, the teacher and the link-teachers, concerned the girls’ school uniform. The teacher stated;

In 2009, at one time the students suggested that the girl’s uniforms should have pockets because it was difficult for them to put all the small things they had. So they requested that the pocket should

be included. It was brought to us teachers and the head of the school. We accepted that it was okay, so today you can see a lot of our girls with uniforms with pockets.

In relation to the changes regarding student's involvement in decision-making at the school, the link-teacher informed;

Today, the way the school is run, before any decisions we have to think about the students and the students' rights. Every decision is made by the students' right to education and we have to respect their rights as a child. Although, if we see that their wishes would make more harm than good, we will reject their decisions. Some students may think that we are old fashioned, but as link-teachers, we have to respect that it takes time to learn the new culture and for all people to accept it.

The students agreed but added that every time the school council brings "something of importance of the school" to the school administration, "they will definitely allow it". According to Shier's model, it seems that our target school can be recognised at the fifth level where "children share power and responsibility for decision-making", at least at an opportunity stage. Our empirical material showed that there are many procedures that enable the students to share the power and responsibility for decisions with the staff. However, at an obligation stage this is questionable and we think we give a fairer picture as addressing them at level four as it at least has become a policy at the school that "children are *involved* in decision-making processes".

To conclude, the results revealed appeared very gratifying to us as it contradicts all the previous research that we found on the subject of student participation stating that it does not matter how many opportunities students are invited to participate in different decisions-making, their involvement have poor affect on the outcomes (for example Sinclair & Franklin 2000; Thelander 2009). In addition to this, evidence have been given that teachers hardly give children the space to participate actively in decision-making in schools as fear to lose their authority, control and power amongst the children (Siamwiza 1989; Thelander 2009) which also contradicts the presented result of our target school. All of our participants agreed that student participation has increased with the establishment of the class and school councils and a lot of changes have been made. When we asked the students in what way, this was the answer that we received;

Before the school council was introduced, the students never had the access to speak directly to the head the way the executives are doing now. We had to put all our expressions in a suggestion-box and therefore, if they did not find our point clear, it was complications. The head wanted to make a change to facilitate our voices to be heard. So they introduced the class and school councils.

6.3.4. Relationships and Communication

The relationships between the students, school council representatives, teachers and school administration was described to be working very well according to all participants. It seemed to be a lot of respect between all members of the school, an awareness of the different roles and recognition that everyone is an important part of the development of the school. The communication was described to be straight-forward, openly and friendly.

The students outside the school council informed us that they have a “great” relationship with the school council representatives and added that they are “very good to us and are acting very friendly”. They informed us that when students leave reports and complaints, the school council representatives “always try their best to solve the conflicts”. In line with the arguments of Stern (2006), when children experience respect and consideration for their views, they can also discover the importance of respect for the views of others. The students gave us an example that if a teacher has done something wrong that the class is not happy about, the class representatives take the issue straight to the administration to get a respond. Commonly, the school council representatives will communicate the complaints to the teacher in a “friendly tone”, with the support of the school administration, which has improved the relationship between teachers and students. As some students expressed it; “we are not there to oppose the teachers or to embarrass them, but just to air our views”. In fact, every participant agreed that the relationship between students and teachers has changed and that they are taking each others’ rights seriously. Using the theories of childhood sociology, the changed relationship between students and teacher are contributing to a development of democracy at the school. Before, beating was common at the school and some students and teachers were “enemies”. A lot of students used to “fear teachers” whilst other students “insulted teachers”. The students further explained that when they were getting insulted or offended by a teacher, they felt upset and at times students walked out of the classrooms. This confirms the picture presented by Siamwiza (1989) that there has been a lot of social distance between teachers and students in Zambia. Nowadays, most of the teachers and the students “are trying to be friendly and open to each other”. If a student is doing something that “is not right”, the teachers consult the student and solve it through interactions. The teacher expressed that he is enjoying to be with the students and listening to their discussions; “you know, these students got a lot and even as a teacher, I learn a lot from them”. Looking to the childhood sociology theory, the culture of children and adults are intricately interlinked

(Corsaro 2005). It contradicts the perception that children should “rather be seen and not heard”, which generates in a greater gap between adults and children (Ncube 1998; Lansdown 2001). The school council representatives reported that;”still, there is some teachers not doing the right to us, but not on that level they used to do in the classroom” which can be justified by looking to the element of power in adult-child relations. It is controversial, and perhaps problematic in many ways, as Stern (2006) states. The link-teacher explained that there is a “mutual respect” and “it is very hard to find teachers who are insulting students” but the relationship is depending on “the different personalities of the teachers”. There are some teachers “who will define themselves as students” but other feels rather satisfied to “mix themselves with the students”. Still, there is some difference between students and teachers, as “it should” as one student explained it and gave this example of the school uniform:

The uniform is good because then all looks the same and you can't see the differences. Children needs to be separated from the teachers, otherwise, we would compete with the teachers and with each other. If we would wear different clothes, it would be difficult because most of the students would be concentrating on fashion instead of the school and students who cannot afford nice clothes would feel outside.

It shows that students, despite a positive parity relationship with their teachers, share a need for positive authorities who can guide them right.

Furthermore, the students stated that the link-teacher is “very nice to us”. Even the teacher recognised that the link-teachers “mix very well with all students and their relationship is free”. Whenever the students need advice, they turn to the link-teachers who encourage them and “it has been like this since the beginning”. The link-teachers described their relationship with the students in the following way:

As a link-teacher I am like a parent, an adviser and there to listen to their views, because, the link-teacher is someone who should have respect for their integrity. It is difficult to tell that you have that character, but you try by all means to do that.

The teachers own relationship with the link-teachers was described as “they are my friends”. The link-teachers invite every teacher to participate in the activities regarding student participation. Even the head of the school seems to encourage the students and working towards increasing student participation at the school. The students experienced that they always try to meet the needs of the students which they appreciated very much. When children feel empowered, as the students expressed they did by looking to the examples above, it can be a positive experience for all involved, not only for themselves (Stern 2006).

Especially, the head-teacher was described in good words. The school council representatives stated;

This year we have had three meetings with him. He is not like other head-teachers; whatever they say is the way. Instead, he allows us to express our views openly and freely and put whatever we are saying into consequences and consideration. Whatever we have said to him has actually been approved. And, he tells us to call him father and he calls a lot of students by their name.

6.3.5. Challenges

Since the introduction of the class and school councils, the school has experienced a lot of improvements and development, as well as encountered some difficulties and challenges. The greatest challenge with the class and school councils, expressed by all participants, has been the attitudes amongst the teacher's towards it. The link-teacher stated;

They were not used to the thought that students can say what they want, express their voices freely and they felt threatened, you know. They were used to be able to say, this and that way is the way it should be, I am here and you are there. They had to change it as equal, so that was a challenge.

This demonstrates a traditional society where school settings have been built around the authority of adults over children (Kirby & Woodhead 2003). The school council representatives explained that the teachers' negative attitude toward the class and school councils relates to the fact that "they misunderstand the purpose of the school council". They do not "like to be taken advice from the school council" and do not realise that the school council exists "for the aim of the school". It stresses Stern's argument that children, as well as adults, are a part of society and should be recognised as a group which can make valuable contributions to the society. The students also informed that some teachers think that the school council always tries to knock down on teachers. Every time the students need to have a class or school council meeting it does not matter whether the teachers were teaching or not, the meetings are always to be prioritised. This means that lessons will be cancelled, which has created some problems with the teachers attitude towards the class and school councils. Although, the representatives calculated that approximately 75 percent of the teachers are supporting the class and school councils.

The teacher described that in the beginning, some teachers condemned the civic education teachers as they thought that they were the ones to "destroy the students and making the school become undisciplined". Even in "their role as a parent", as some of the teachers are, they feared that "their own children would challenge them" which made the establishment of

the class and school councils difficult. The link-teacher had to speak to them about the benefits with student participation and the importance of the right of the child as it was not fully understood. This is a good example of one difficulty in the practical implementation of CRC article 12 where the adults' attitudes towards children and child participation are being challenged (Thelander 2009).

Another challenge with the establishment of the class and school councils has been the development of a "new culture" amongst students. This is in line with the concept 'interpretive reproduction', the process of appropriation, reinvention and reproduction. Children are actually creating their own unique children's cultures while simultaneously contributing to the production of the adult society (Corsaro 2005). The difficulties in this matter have been, in one way, for students to bring out constructive critique in a good manner without becoming "enemies" with teachers and on the other hand, not stopping students from expressing their views freely. From the other perspective, teachers needed to learn how to handle the critique given without taking it personally and realising the importance of the child's rights. According to CRC article 12, children's views are to be expressed freely and taken into account in all matters concerning them. Further, the more traditional and conservative society, the stricter its power hierarchies usually are and the more likely it is that children's views and wishes are not seen as being particularly important (Stern 2006). It may not seem strange that some teachers expressed that the students are given "so much freedom so that they can say anything they want and even condemn the teacher in a bad way". As the participants pointed out, there has to be a balance; "rights come with responsibility".

Other challenges have been of a more practical nature. In general the schedule is tied up within the school. The class and school councils sometimes fail to have their meetings because of for example public exams in grade 12 which takes up a whole month every year. In 2010 for example, the exams began earlier which came in the way for productive school council activities. In 2011, the election will be held in Zambia and a lot of the school council activities will focus on the election process and sharing the information with the students and take up time from other important school council matters.

A different challenge, mentioned by the teacher, is the failure of the school administration to respond to certain projects and other good ideas at the right time, suggested by the students, because of limited resources. Most of the schools in Zambia are depending on school fees of the students and when students are not able to pay, the school will lack in resources. The

teacher stated that the school could reach “all of the wishes from students, if they were just well financially”. When projects suggested by students are not met at the right time, which is very unfortunate, it results in many “understandable” complaints made by students. From the link-teachers’ perspective, there is a challenge to manage every class and school council meetings. She mentioned that there are some school council representatives who do not appear at every meeting, which challenges student participation through class and school councils as they are the one represent their classes. The same thought was found by Flutter (2006), that there is a difficulty to ensure that the views from the majority of students are fairly represented.

6.3.6. Benefits

The benefits with student participation through the class and school councils have been far more than the challenges. One of the most important changes reported by several participants has been that lessons have become “learner-centred” from being “adult-centred”. As a result, the view of the child has changed. Before, teachers usually came up with the ideas but today, students contribute with their thoughts and ideas on how to improve the school environment which have increased their self-esteem. In fact, the teachers are even learning from the students and the school “exists for the students and not the other way around”, as the teacher declared. To reach the national goals that has been set up; “we are there to help students in any way possible as teachers”. This was how one of the students expressed it:

We receive a lot with this school council, like the way we have come. At first we wouldn’t talk at all. As we have grown as the council we have learnt to, how can I explain it?! I suppose, even like myself, the CRC has taken a natural action. It has taught us a lot of things about rights and stuff like that. We are privileged and we are going to miss this school.

According to another student, the class and school councils are giving the school administration “a chance to do their duties”. Furthermore, according to the students, the class and school councils have “improved the learning facilities”. Development is taking place and as the teachers are changing their teaching methods and the relationship are becoming more equal, previous fear of teachers has decreased. As a result, students have become more concentrated on the actual school work with improved results. Significantly, as Kirby & Woodhead stresses (2003), students who are reporting that their school have an effective class and school councils generally have a very positive attitude towards the overall social and academic aspects of school life. From the teachers’ perspective, even they are benefitting as

the suggestions brought up by the students, in general, are “very good” and would not be recognised without students’ participation:

There are many things that the students bring out that helps and encourages us teachers. There are, for example, certain things that they observe which are not good. When they speak out, you can learn as a teacher and think, okay, I have to change as a teacher. When the students point out our mistakes as teachers, we are able to learn and change.

The link-teachers agreed and added that since the class and school councils was established, the attendance of teachers has increased and “they are becoming more serious”. The teacher stated that student participation helps the school be aware of “where the students come from” and the students to:

...develop the qualities that participation requires, such as speaking up for what they believe in, to represent the class opinions in important matters and learning how to problem-solving in local issues. And, how to participate in decision-making through voting and even, how to accept and respect the majorities will.

The result declared by the link-teachers in terms of discipline in school is that, nowadays, students are more respectful and tolerant towards each other and taking more responsibility for their and their peers’ behaviour.

6.3.7. Prospects, Future Wishes and Opportunities

The participants had many prospects and future wishes with the increased student participation through class and school councils. For example, to continue to have open discussions among the students on “how to build a Zambia where all citizens are free to discuss issues openly” and “learn how to weight the advantages with the disadvantages with all decisions that are made”. Once more, our empirical material is in line with recent childhood sociology theories where children are seen as active agents who contribute to their own childhood through the negotiation with adults and peers. From the teacher’s point of view, he wished that all students will learn how to participate freely, and, that each and everyone will start to appreciate the class and school councils as they will get a deeper understanding that the council “is there for them”. He also wished that the class and school councils will continue to develop and is “here to stay” as “it is really building us”. Even the link-teachers wished that this new idea with student participation will continue to further develop the school. At the moment, the link-teachers are working to “set up the guidelines” on how to address and promote issues to get a more coherent, stable and settled class and school

councils organisation. Again, our participants, in line with Alderson (2000), Allan & I ‘Anson (2004) and Morrow (1999) stress the importance of improving other aspects of the school to make the class and school councils to a functional organisation. From the students’ opinion, all teachers “should accept the views of the students which are helping the class representatives and the executives in promoting the development of the school”. The link-teacher declared; “changes cannot be accepted by everyone, but if the majority accepts it, we can ignore the minority”.

Further, the link-teachers wished that their role as link-teachers will develop to take a more “passive role”. For example, they wished that the school council to be run “freely” without having to remind the students of the times of meetings, and, that the voices of students will be stronger compare to the head as they become a bigger part of the decision-making at the school. Fundamental and genuine child participation in decision-making includes that children have influence over the decisions that are made (Sinclair & Franklin 2000) and are a way of empowerment, where children are getting more power over the decisions that are made. This confirms’ the definition of participation in CRC article 12, as the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives. To reach this kind of goals, the link-teacher suggested that workshop is a way of subsidising both the students and teachers. For the year of 2011, they are planning to have at least three workshops to increase the school members understanding of class and school councils; one including the teachers, one including all students and one for the school council representatives.

Another prospect for the future is to extend the idea of student participation through class and school councils to other surrounding schools in Copperbelt Province. At the moment, our target school are working to initiate discussions on how student participation can be organised at other high schools. As Rasmusson (2011) stresses, in young democracies with young populations, such as Zambia, schools are important in the development of democratic values. The school council representatives also wish to make the concept of student participation known at basic school level and to subsidise younger students of the rights of the child. They gave many good suggestions on how this goal could be reached. The first step for the school council is to invite the Children’s Right’s Club and together come up with suggestions on how to present the class and school council structure to the basic schools. When such ideas are agreed, the next step will be to take the mission to the basic schools, preferably start with grade 9 and introduce class and school councils for the school administration, the teachers and all students. Development is taking place.

7. Critical Reflections

Since our results presented above have been mainly positive, we found it of major importance to accomplish a critical discussion on how it can be explained and understood. Firstly, the results are dependent on a time and space dimension. It is consisted of empirical data representing one school and was collected during a limited period of six weeks, which affected the reliability of the results. Therefore, we are questioning if the same results would have been achieved if the study were conducted at another time or at another school. The latter we are very much reluctant to as we visited other nearby schools and we got the impression that they were composed of a more strict hierarchical structure, recognised in traditional societies. In this sentence, we also want to highlight the exceptionality with the head-teacher at our target school. In many ways, he acted in very democratic manner and took a withdrawn position, comfortable enough to sharing control and power with other members of the school, both teachers and students.

Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that our study is not an evaluation of how well the class and school councils are organised and operated. Our purpose has rather been to describe and analyse the class and school councils at a target high school in Copperbelt. This means that we took an open-minded position during our research to understand the meaning of the class and school councils in this particular context. Thus, we did not put less consideration to critically examine them.

Another critical reflection we want to discuss is whether the participants have had an interest to portray the class and school councils in positive terms. Here it is important to mention that we only interviewed one teacher. The picture presented from the participants was in general positive with the exception regarding previous negative attitudes amongst teachers. This picture may have conveyed a different message, that negative attitudes still exist to a greater extent amongst teachers, if we had been able to interview more teachers. Further, we cannot fully ensure that the sample well represents the school as a whole, although our sample was randomly drawn. The discussion we had in the method section, that we, as two female students from a different socio-cultural context conducted this case study, inevitable have an impact on the results.

To address these critical concerns, further studies in this area are preferable. As a suggestion, similar studies need to be made at other surrounding schools in Copperbelt Province in order to determine the study's reliability. Further, to carry out longer and deeper studies at the same

school using various methods as there is likeliness that a different result would be revealed. Most of all, we argue that it is necessary to continue to have these open discussions of what student participation mean in various socio-cultural context, not at least in developing countries. And, how student participation can be organised and operated, for example through class and school councils, in the work towards increasing the right of the child. In this sentence, different kinds of evaluation are necessary.

8. Summary

The results from our case study show that class and school councils seem to be working surprisingly well at our target school in contradiction to most of the previous research presented on the subject. All participants expressed that they are very satisfied with the class and school councils, the way they are organised and operated. Further, the class and school councils seem to be well structured and encouraging student participation at all levels, applying to students both in- and outside the student council. The students presented several concrete examples on how their participation both affects and promotes their school situation. It appears that the students' voices actually are taken into account in various decisions in collaboration with the school administration. Recognised practical improvements, not yet met with the organisation of the class and school councils, would be to schedule the meetings to ensure that they are taking place continuously and to extend the concept to nearby schools. Still, the target school is in the preface of increasing student participation and we argue that this is an ongoing process with no ending as improvements always can be made. Negative attitudes amongst teachers towards the class and school council are still a challenge, even though to a decreased extent.

Perhaps the most important changes with the establishment of the class and school councils concern the improved relationship between teachers and students as well as the view of the child as an active participant at the school. Even though there have been some challenges with the establishment of the class and school councils, the general attitude towards student participation are very positive and an awareness of the rights of the child is obvious. Further, the students are not only very open and free in expressing their views. They seem to be very capable of using their right to participation in a responsible, respectful and driving manner as it is argued, from the socio-cultural context, that "rights come with responsibility". The strict

hierarchical structure within the African school system, mentioned in most previous research on the subject, was not recognised during our stay at the school.

As a conclusion, it seems that student participation through class and school councils at our target school do not only contribute to societal change with increased democracy, but also enrich the students' current situation by seeing them as key-contributors in the improvements of the school. In other words, student participation does not only seem to create good citizens; the students' contributions are given an important value in itself. Not least, class and school councils have become an "agreed policy" at the school and it is no longer a question whether students should participate or not. In this way, class and school councils can be seen as a "winning formula" in contradiction to results presented in most previous research – that class and school councils are not enough to increase student participation. This may have to do with the fact that the class and school councils are not the only way to increase student participation at our target school. Instead, student participation is guided and encouraged in a number of activities at the school; at lessons, through debates, workshops and clubs. Based on these positive results, even though they are conducted from a case study at one school and cannot be seen as universal, the prospects of initiating class and school councils at other schools in similar socio-cultural contexts, as a way of increasing student participation, are both possible and achievable. It can benefit the students themselves, the school as a whole as well as the country in the work towards fulfilling the goal of increased democracy.

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Appendix 1: The Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12.

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Appendix 2: Interviews with students, link-teachers and teachers

Welcome

- Thank you so much for coming today
- How has your week been?

Since last time

- Firstly, I want to ask you if you have any questions since our last meeting.
- Is there something you wonder; something that you want to clarify or that you want me to clarify for you?

Today's meeting

- This meeting is going to be a little bit different than last week.
- It is going to be a little bit longer.
- In between we are going to have a coffee-break where we will provide you with some refreshments.
- During the two sessions, I am going to ask you some questions by bringing up different topics for you to discuss that will help me and Sandra in our research
- If it is okay we will be recording our meeting as we did last time?
- Therefore, I would ask you to think of two things:
 1. Try to speak one by one
 2. Save all questions that you want us to answer, and we are happy to take a break in between or answer your questions after the interview.
- Before we continue, do you have any questions?

PART I

School and class council

1. At a **class council meeting**, can you give any examples of *topics* that you normally discuss?
2. Can one of you *describe* a **class council meeting**?
 - a) How often do you have the class council meetings?
 - b) How long does it go for?
 - c) Who choose the topics?
 - d) How is the discussion?
 - e) Is everyone in the class free to contribute and ask questions?
 - f) What is the role for the school council rep during that meeting?
 - g) What happens after a class council meeting?
3. What do you know about the **school council**?
 - a) Different roles at the school council representatives (president, chairperson, secretary)
 - b) How do you choose pupils to the school council?
 - c) Do you know what topics they discuss in a school council meeting?
 - d) How do you get information from the school council?
 - e) How is your relationship with the school council?

Link Teacher

4.
 - a) Do you know how many link-teacher you have on this school?
 - b) What is the role of the **link-teacher**?
 - c) Can you, with your own words, *describe* what a **link-teacher** does?
 - d) How is your relationship with the **link-teacher**?
 - e) How do you *communicate* with each other?
5. **The concept of Child and Childhood**
 - a) At what *age* are you a **child** in *Zambia*?
 - b) With your own words, what does it *mean* to be a **child**?
 - c) Can you *describe* a **child** for me?
 - d) *When* does a **child** *become* an **adult person**?
 - e) *How* does a **child** *become* an **adult person**?
 - f) How is the *relationship* between adult and children?

BREAK...

PART II

Student Participation

Mind-map

This time, we will start with a mind-map game. Instead of asking you a question, I will provide you with a pen and paper and give you two minutes to write down, one by one, what you think of when you hear the word 'student participation'.

When the two minutes have passed, I will let you know. Then, we will together write down all the words and thoughts that you have come up with on a big piece of paper. Is everything clear?

So, what do you associate with the word 'student participation'?

Discussion of the mind map

I will read up loud all the words.

1. Is this a good/correct *picture* of **student participation**?
2. Is there anything that you *miss* that you would like to *add*?
3. Is there anything on the mind-map that you *do not agree with*?

School Council/Student Participation

4. Do you think that school council facilitates student participation?

If yes... see 5.

5. In what way does **school council** *facilitate* **student participation**?
6. What do you think that **student participation** and **school council** *means* to...
 - a) You?
 - b) Student Council?
 - c) Teachers?
 - d) School administration?
7. In which **decision-making** are students at XXX high school *allowed* to be *involved in*?
8. Can you describe *how* you are *a part in* **decision-making**?
9. Do you know what *happens* with the **decisions** that are made in the **class council**?
10. In this sentence, are there any *differences since before* the **class council and school council** was *introduced*?

Attitudes and Relationships

11. Which are and has been the **attitude** towards **class and school council** amongst:
 - a) Students?

- b) Teachers?
- c) School administration?

12. Can you *describe* the **relationship** between student and teachers?

13. Can you *describe the relationship* between students and teachers before the class council and school council was introduced?

14. Has the **relationship** *changed* since school council has been introduced?

School Council: Challenges/Benefits

15. Can you write down three challenges and three benefits with class and school council?

16. Future game...

In the group I want you to take two minutes to discuss and write down how you in the future, would wish that the school council was working at XXX high school?

How can we work to reach that goal?

Write down...

Last question...

17. Is that anything of importance that we have forgot to ask you that we should know in relation to student participation and school council?

Appendix 3: Semi-structured interviews with teacher and link-teachers

Class and School Council

1. How long have you had school council at XXX high school?
2. How was the information about school council introduced for you teachers?
3. Can you describe the school council with your own word?
4. Can you describe class council with your own word?
5. What is the purpose of the class and school councils?
6. How are the class council and school council organised?
7. How often do you have class and school council meetings?
8. What is your role as a teacher/link-teacher during the class council meetings?
9. What is your role as a teacher/link-teacher during the school council meetings?
10. Which are your experiences of the class and school council?
11. A) Which are and has been the benefit with the class and school councils?

B) Which are and has been the challenges with the class and school councils?

Link-teacher

12. What is the role of the link-teacher? Can you describe it?
13. How is your relationship with the link-teacher/teachers?
14. How is the student's relationship with the link-teacher/teachers?

Student Participation

15. What is student participation for you?
16. What do you think student participation means to;
 - a) Students
 - b) Teachers/link-teachers
 - c) School administration
17. How is the class and school councils operated in relation to student participation?
18. Do you think that student participation has increased since the introduction of the class and school councils?

If yes, in what way has student participation increased?

19. Can you give me any other examples at XXX high school other than the class and school councils where student's participation is taken into consideration?

Attitudes

20. From your experience, which are and has been the attitudes towards school councils amongst

- a) Students
- b) Teachers/link-teachers
- c) School administration?

21. In general speaking, can you describe the relationship between students and teachers?

22. How was the relationship before the class and school councils were introduced?

To be a child in Zambia

23. At what age are you a child in Zambia?

24. What does it mean to be a child in Zambia?

25. In general can you describe the relationship between adult and children?

Future & ending

26. In the future, how would you wish that student participation was working at XXX high school?

27. Can you give me any suggestions, on how you today could work, to reach that goal?

28. Is there anything of importance that we have forgotten to ask you about the class and school council and student participation?

29. Is there anything you want to add or clarify?

Appendix 4: A Minor Field Study of Student Participation through Class and School Councils in Copperbelt Province, Zambia

We are two Swedish female students, Ms Sandra Ammitzboll and Ms Charlotta Hall, from Lund University in the south of Sweden. At this point, we are completing our 6th semester on the program *Bachelor of Science in Social Work*. For this occasion, we have had the privilege to go to Zambia for 8 weeks to do a Minor Field Study (sponsored by SIDA) that will result in a final thesis. Our purpose of the study is to do a case study on Student Participation through Class and School Councils in Copperbelt Province, Zambia. We are happy to say that our target school for this field study will be xxx high school in xxx district.

Our intention is to get an understanding of ‘student participation’ from a socio-cultural perspective, taking the Zambian culture and children’s perspectives into account. By describing and analysing student participation, we want to understand the meaning of participation and how the class and school councils are organised and operated in relation to the school activities regarding student participation.

We are very excited to do this study on student participation as we have never been to Zambia before. However, we have been provided with a lot of positive information and experiences from our tutor in Sweden, PhD Bodil Rasmusson, about the country itself, the people and project within the International Training Programme: *Child Rights, Classroom and School Management*. Further, we have had access to very interesting readings from the change agents’ report: "Child Rights Implementation in Zambia - evaluating the impact in three pilot schools on the Copperbelt" by Ms Mambe Miyanda, Mr Stephen Chishiko and Mr Kezala Kelly Mwale.

At this initial stage of the study, our major method in collecting data will be through focus group interviews with students and semi-structured interviews with teachers and link-teachers at xxx high school. If possible, we are hoping to arrange two focus groups-meetings, one with school council representatives and one with students not representing the school council.

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