

# SRI LANKA

Raising awareness among the Interns as to how maximum participation of Grade Five students could be guaranteed through Child Rights Convention.

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## 1. Introduction

Children beautify the world. 'Child is the father of man' as William Wordsworth metaphorically pointed it out. The buds, if not properly looked after, provided with nourishment, love and affection, the beauty of them, the ability to perfume the whole world with their sweet scent would probably be a dream which would never be realized. A similar notion is given by Dr. Joyce Brothers that "if a child is given love, he becomes loving.....,if he is helped when he needs help, he becomes helpful and if he has been truly valued at home... he grows up secure enough to look beyond himself to the welfare of others". Here it must be mentioned that not only at home but how the child is treated at school too has a direct impact upon his wellbeing.

Children have their own rights with their own requirements such as love and affection, protection, freedom education and so on. It is still an unanswerable question as to find out how many of the children enjoy their rights and privileges at present.

The most important period of a person's life is childhood which shapes and decides the rest of his/her life.

It is in this context that attention is focused on the children in Sri Lanka whose rights seem to be, to some extent, affected in terms of their participation. Here, the three Ps are of paramount importance as far as child rights are concerned. i.e.

1. Provision
  2. Protection
  3. Participation
- which include almost all areas concerned.

As mentioned above, this project focuses on, to what extent, children, particularly in Grade Five in many of the government schools in Sri Lanka, who are getting ready for the Scholarship Exam held in August every year, do enjoy their participation in various activities inside and outside school.

It seems that because of the preparation for the scholarship exam, many children have to bury the innocence of childhood and they are compelled to work according to a rigid time-table with a view to passing the exam. Passing this exam gives the child a chance to gain admission to a leading school in the city and the best students especially in the rural sector can benefit from this exam. It should be mentioned that it is parents, who work harder than the children in order to get such a school for their children.

This situation calls for a large-scale research other than confining to a small-scale project as it affects mental, psychological, emotional and social development of the child. During this period, probably from grade three to five through which the child is prepared for the exam, experiences inexpressible stress losing playful childhood and joys of their lives.

Hence, this study attempts to find out and provide possible alternatives to get maximum participation of students in both curricular as well as co-curricular activities and also to show higher achievement levels enhancing overall development of the nation's buds.

## 2. Frame of Reference

Since this study mainly focuses on children's participation in curricular and co-curricular activities, much has been mentioned and discussed on children's participation. The following information taken from various sources elaborate this point.

Children's rights are comprehensively protected by a wide -ranging set of international and regional instruments spanning human rights, humanitarian and refugee law.

Children benefit from the rights contained in general treaties. In addition, a number of specialist instruments have been created to accord extra protection to children given their particular vulnerability and the importance to society as a whole in ensuring the healthy development and **active participation** of its young members.

The over-arching framework for children's rights is the 1989 UN Convention on the rights of the child.(CRC) This was the first treaty specifically concerned with the rights of the children and marked an important shift in thinking towards a "rights- based approach" which help government legally accountable for failing to meet the needs of children. The convention created a new vision of children as bearers of rights and responsibilities appropriate to their age rather than viewing them as the property of their parents or the helpless recipients of charity.

Children's rights cover four main aspects of a child's life: the right to survive, the right to develop, the right to be protected from harm and the right to participate.

## 2.1 Who is a child?

The definition of a child under the CRC covers all human beings under the age of 18 unless the relevant national law recognizes an earlier age of maturity. However, the convention emphasizes that the substitution of an earlier age of maturity must be in conformity with the spirit of the convention and its guiding principles and thus, should not be used to undermine the rights of the child.

Children's rights cover every aspect of the lives of children and adolescents and can be broken down in to the following main categories:

1. Survival rights: the right to life and to have the most basic needs met (e.g. adequate standard of living, shelter, nutrition, medical treatment).
2. Development rights: the rights enabling children to reach their fullest potential (e. g, education, play and leisure, cultural activities, access to information and freedom of thought, conscience and religion).
3. Participation rights: rights and allow children and adolescents to take an active role in their communities (e. g. the freedom to express opinions; to have a say in matters affecting their own lives; to join associations).
4. Protection rights: rights those are essential for safeguarding children and adolescents from all forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation (e. g, special care for refugee children; protection against involvement in armed conflict, child labour, sexual exploitation, torture and drug abuse). UNITED NATIONS Convention on the rights of the Child (1989) Optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (2000)

This Optional protocol is designed to criminalize activities that involve the sale and illegal adoption of children as well as child prostitution and child pornography. The protocol entered into force on 18 January 2002.

Optional protocol to the convention on the rights of the child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (2000)

This Optional protocol states that 18 is the age at which direct participation in armed conflict is permitted. It also bans compulsory recruitment under the age of 18. However, it falls short of banning voluntary recruitment under 18 but requires states to make a declaration upon ratification stating the age at which national law permits voluntary recruitment and demonstrating the steps taken to ensure that such recruitment is not compulsory. The protocol entered in to force on 12 February 2002.

Universal Children's Day (20 November) World Day Child Labour (12 June)

### **2.3 Child protection Bodies in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka has a separate mechanism to promote and protect the rights of children. The ministry of child development and women's Empowerment is the line ministry concerning child rights. There is the national Child protection Authority (NCPA) as well. There are legislations and special institution that provide de jure protection for children from being employed as domestic servants and other exploitative work.

The labour Ministry of Sri Lanka has a special unite that investigates child labour cases, including a hot line that receives information about children who are employed as domestic servants. The department of probation and child care Services provides protection to child victims of abuse and sexual exploitation . There are special desks established in police stations namely children & women's Bureaus to look into offence related to children.

Further, Sri Lankan Constitution has a provision for the advancement of children that requires the enactment of laws and subordinate legislations, as well as executive action.

Sri Lanka has ratified a great deal of international treaties, including the following that help protect child rights and support the education of children.

- International Covenant on Economic , social and cultural Rights (ICESCR)
- International Covenant on Civil and political Rights (ICCPR)
- Convention on the Rights of the rights (CRC)
- Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination (ICERD)
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of racial Discrimination (ICERD)

- Convention against Torture and other Cruel , Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or punishment (CAT)
- Convention concerning the prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour.
- Convention for the suppression of the Traffic in persons and of the Exploitation of the prostitution of others.

*Implication of Articles of UN CRC in these projects*

Article 3 – The best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children

Article 13- The child shall have the right to freedom of expression

Article 31- The right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities

Article 36- Protect the child against all other forms of exploitation.

## **2.4 The System of Education in Sri Lanka.**

The present educational system of Sri Lanka has been influenced by the British Educational system which was introduced by the British colonizers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They established colleges for girls and boys separately, which consisted of primary schools, lower secondary and higher secondary schools. In 1938 the education in government schools was made available free of charge with the grant of Universal Franchise in 1931.

After many political and social changes, today we find a system of education in Sri Lanka which has taken its maximum effort to produce useful citizens to face future challenges in this global village. Primary education lasts five years at the end of which the students sit a competitive scholarship examination. Those who pass this exam qualify themselves to gain admission to popular schools in the city and are granted monthly financial support until they pass out from the university. Despite many problems in the country, educational reforms introduced in 1999, the Primary Education showed a notable progress. After primary education, students enter junior secondary education and study for five years and at grade eleven they have to face another government examination namely G.C.E. Ordinary Level to get qualified for senior secondary education for another two years at the end of which they have to face G.C.E. Advanced Level Examination. The results of this exam determine university entrance.

Those who are not qualified to enter universities can either enter vocational technical colleges or find employment in private or government sector as trainees for some

time until they become permanent employees based on their performance. They also can pursue higher studies as external students at universities or Open University of Sri Lanka. The Open University was established in 1980 with the idea of conferring degrees and diplomas to the working population who can do part-time courses by paying tuition fees.

The medium of instructions of schools at present is Sinhala and Tamil But in some selected schools English medium is also available for some subjects at junior and secondary levels. In universities, for medical and engineering faculties, the medium of instruction is English and other universities it can be Sinhala, Tamil or English. A distinctive feature of the system of Education of Sri Lanka is that all primary and secondary school students get free uniforms and free Text Books from the government.

In addition to these, there are private schools, International schools Semi –governmental institutes which provide education and vocational training.

### 3. The purpose

The sole intention of doing this study is to create a conducive learning environment for the Grade Five students who are being prepared for the grade five scholarship examination held in government schools. Through observations of grade five classes, it was discovered that much emphasis is laid on preparing students to pass the above examination and students are made to undergo immense pressure as passing this examination qualifies students to gain admission to a leading school and continue education with a financial assistance given by the the state. Majority of the students in Grade Five classes can be found depriving their child rights because of this competition. For instance, at school they are terribly busy with paper work specially doing model papers and past papers along with the heavy syllabus and after school many attend tuition classes in order to gain more knowledge to pass this exam. The participation of these students in happy learning environment is relatively very low. This situation called for our attention and more emphasis was placed on teaching methodologies with a view to getting more participation and learning be made a joyful and pleasant experience through which the students learn and show higher achievement level without suffering from exam phobia and other agonies.

#### 3.1 The Target Group

There are two main target groups. The first target group is the teacher trainees who are undergoing the pre-service teacher training programme at National Colleges of Education. The first two years are residential and the third year they are attached to an

internship school where they have to teach for one year. Usually three or four interns or internees, as they are called, are appointed to one school. First, these teacher trainees are trained to teach grade five students to ensure maximum participation with activity based learning.

The second target group is Grade Five students of selected internship schools who are being taught by those interns. And the other stakeholders are teachers of those schools, Principals, parents and well-wishers.

## 4. Methodology and Activities

Since the aim of this study is to ensuring students (Grade5) maximum participation in the learning teaching process through which higher achievement level is expected, a couple of approaches were employed. One was attitude - centered approach though which the teacher trainees, mentors, and principals were informed and briefed on what direction and orientation the study was expected to carry out. Their understanding, awareness and perception were of prime importance to see the success of this endeavor. The other approach was the activity –based approach through which the teacher trainees attached to NCOEs were trained, briefed and made aware as to how maximum participation could be ensured. From lesson planning to implementation and evaluation, the lesson format, visual aids, activities prepared, teacher behavior in classroom, teacher pupil interactions, pupil-pupil interactions, classroom language of the teacher etc. were observed and necessary instructions and guidelines were given.

Apart from these, the initial discussions held with the teacher trainees, mentors and principals of the respective internship schools facilitated the implementation of this project.

The schools selected for this study were

1. Sirimavo Bandaranayaka Girls College in Matale.
2. Sri Sangamitta Girls College in Matale.
3. Madeena National College in Madawala in Kandy
4. Ellalamulla Primary School in Mirigama.
5. Dharmapala Primary in Mirigama.

This study was implemented through the internees attached to National Colleges of Education which offer three year pre-service teacher training programme of which two years of residential training and third year at a given school for their internship training. Since two of the three researchers are employed as lecturers at two different NCOES (Mahaweli NCOE and Hapitigama NCOE) and the other one is working as

a principal of such Internship school, the feasibility of this research turned out to be a reality. Constant meetings, discussions, telephone conversations, observations among the researchers and also with the principals, mentors and internees contributed a lot to succeed in the direction of planned work.

As far as the activities are concerned, more emphasis was placed on the lesson planning as the focus of the study was on participation. Here, all the interns of the above mentioned schools were asked to prepare lesson plans paying more attention to students' active participation which ultimately result in joyful learning plus higher achievement. Child centeredness, more activity sheets, task sheets and group work pair work were given priority to achieve the objectives of the lessons done.

Regular observations were done in real classroom situations by means of evaluation sheets and marks were awarded. The interns were advised to consider both inside and outside classroom for conducting their lessons depending on the nature of the lesson. Role plays, dramatization, dialogue, win-win competitions were used in an interesting manner to ensure more participation in the given activities. The interns were asked to maintain reflective journals of each lesson at the end.



In other words the methodologies employed could be mentioned as follows.

### *Activity 1*

Empowering teacher trainees

1. Attitude – Centered Approach
2. Activity – based approach

A film was screened for discussion, brain storming session, group work presentation on CRC etc.

### *Activity 2*

Training the Teacher trainees on the practice of child rights

lesson plan

visual aids

activity sheets

group work

pair work

### *Activity 3*

Principals, teachers and parent's orientation programme in relevant schools

### *Activity 4*

Practices in the schools

- Inside the class rooms
- Outside the class rooms

### *Activity 5.*

Reflections with the Interns, Principals, senior teachers at schools.

## **4.1 Limitations of the study**

It is quite natural for anybody to encounter challenges and limitations when carrying out ventures of this nature. The limitations encountered by the researchers can be mentioned as follows.

1. Lack of awareness of CRC among some principals and mentors and primary teaches
2. Over-crowded classrooms
3. Heavy syllabus
4. Lack of facilities like OHP, multi media projectors etc. for effective classroom work
5. Lack of support from parents as primary concern was on passing Grade five Scholarship examination.
6. Lack of space in classrooms for group work, presentations etc.

## 5. Results/Outcome.

Despite the challenges and limitations, with the input received from Sweden during the phase ii, satisfactory results could be obtained from the study carried out.

The target group of the study was the interns and through them the grade five students of the above five schools. Almost all students of grade five classes in Sri Lanka are fully occupied with the notion of passing the Grade Five Scholarship Examination. For this, other than book work paper work, noting else can be seen in many classrooms. Teachers of these classes have no other work other than covering syllabus and preparing the learners for the examination which is usually held at the end of August in every year. Either class wise or otherwise these students are taught to prepare for the exam without paying attention to their participation. Only grades or marks determine child's performance which has a very negative impact on the child in the long run. This was the main reason to carry out a study in this regard.

Before the study, through observations it was witnessed that most of the learners of grade five were passive learners and 90% teachers used teacher-centered approach to teach these students without considering much about the psychological emotional and physical aspects of these learners. Silent, well-controlled classrooms were considered to be the best which were devoid of active interactions and free movements of curious learners.

After preliminary discussions with the interns, mentors and principals and with the input given by the team supervisor Mrs. Agneta Flinck, the study was carried out at the respective schools. The methodologies used by the interns with the intention of getting maximum participation showed a gradual improvement. The students of grade five classes, when learning English lessons, showed a keen interest and many volunteered to come forward to do the activities given by the interns. Almost all hands went up when questions were asked by the teacher. The classrooms were converted into child-friendly and child centered classrooms and the teachers played the role of a facilitator. The group activities given were done 90% perfectly and everybody enjoyed the lessons. And a similar lesson was done in Sinhala (mother tongue) at Ellalamulla Primary school where the grade five students acted out a drama based on a given lesson showing maximum participation. Our Mentor Mrs. Agneta bears evidence for this. Besides, art exhibitions, posters on CRC were organized as part of this study at Madeena National School which exhibited hidden thoughts of small children about child rights and how they responded through the medium of art.

What is remarkable from all these activities is that they indicated the fact that learning is best done when the child is placed in a conducive environment and when the child is given opportunities to take part in the learning teaching process.

The objective of the study could be achieved to a great extent. The main feature of this endeavor was to take the students away from the exam mentality and provide them a kind of joyful learning where none was neglected or discriminated.

Finally, the principals, senior teachers and even parents realized the potentials and hidden talents of the students and how they could be utilized and improved through active participation through which both teachers and students can show a higher degree of satisfaction.

## 6. Way Forward.

It is indeed a great pleasure for us, as Change Agents representing Sri Lanka, to be a part of this International Training programme supported by SIDA. A substantial amount of knowledge, experience could be gathered through this programme and also implementing CRC with the input received.

Much work related to CRC is expected to be carried out through the National Network and also Regional Net Work that is Kandy Network.

It is planned to give a deeper insight on CRC to the pre-service teacher trainees being trained at National Colleges of Education in different parts of the Island. There are now eighteen such colleges from which annually nearly 3000 teachers join the teaching profession. Once they go to the schools they can implement new methodologies in order to ensure maximum participation and CRC conventions in both curricular and co-curricular activities.

This study was carried out taking only grade five students. But it is expected to start from grade three and continue from there onwards as when these students reach grade five they will have plenty of opportunities and they will show more interest towards learning.

For the sustainability of all these, Principals' teachers, and parents' positive attitudes towards CRC will be of prime importance. For this, awareness programme from time to time, are expected to conduct at NCOES as there are occasions where principals and senior teachers are invited to NCOES for briefing sessions on Internship Training Programme.

Besides, a criterion on child rights in the classroom during learning teaching process is expected to be included in the evaluation sheet which is used by the lecturers, mentors and principals when observing lessons and offering marks for the lessons of interns at

schools. This can result in paying more attention on children and their rights while teaching.



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