

Evolving Capacities of Children: A Practical Demonstration of its Classroom Workability

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Abstract

Children need protection to enhance autonomy and allow their capacities to evolve. This term has been given many definitions, diverse perspectives, its challenges and limitations to children especially very young children who were seen as too young to exercise their rights in making decision on what pertains to them. Ever since the ratification of evolving capacities of children by the UN, little or nothing has been done in putting this principle into practice in the classroom of young children especially in Nigeria. This could be as a result the concept not having a particular definition that underpins it. This paper therefore analyses a practical demonstration of this concept using a privately-owned early Childhood Education School in Portugal as a case. The paper adopted an analytical method. The data was gathered through direct observations. The study concluded that teachers should not only read or memorise the rights of the child as it regards the evolving capacity of a child but should also put into practice in the classroom. The study concluded that teachers should demonstrate practically the act of the rights of the child by making pupils regardless of their ages or sex to be part of classroom decision making especially on things that affect the children in the classroom. However, teachers were encouraged to collaborate with the children making this a success, embark on different projects using different scenarios or events that could facilitate learning. School owners were encouraged to fund such projects and supervise teachers while embarking on such projects.

Keywords: Children, Classroom, Demonstration, Evolving capacity, Workability

Introduction

The new norm nowadays is that children should be heard and not to be seen alone. This advocates for series of development in ascertaining children being able to exercise their rights especially in matters that concern them. On this note, the convention on the rights of the child came up with an international termed evolving capacity of the child. This law allows children to be actively and democratically involved in all that concern them both in the schools and in the community. The concept of evolving capacities could be termed to be child and youth development (Henderson-Dekort, Smits & Heading (2021).

Evolving capacities is referred to the education, child and youth development programmes to be anchored by adults taking into account the capacities of the child or youth to exercise rights on their own behalf. In the same vein, it is process of making a child to be heard through the help of adults at the same time respect their rights, protect them from harm and provide opportunities that can enable children exercise their rights (Brando, 2020).

Furthermore, evolving capacities could be seen as a limitation of the rights exercised by children or as a

way of recognising special abilities and promotion in children. On the other hand, it also involves recognising childhood is not a single, fixed, universal experience and that their lives require degrees of protection, provision prevention and participation at different stages of their lives. Article (5) five of the Convention speaks about evolving capacities that "States Parties shall respect the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided for by local custom, legal guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention". In addition, article twelve also addresses evolving capacities, stated that "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. 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".

Moreover, evolving capacities recognise that as children acquire enhanced competencies there is less need for protection and a greater possibility that require them to take responsibility for decisions affecting their lives. It is assumed that by the [gradualist conception](#) of children's rights, which suggests that children move progressively from a situation which allows their rights to protect their interests to one in which their rights primarily protect their choices (Lansdown, 2002).

Consequently, the convention allows for the recognition that children from different backgrounds, environments and cultures are faced with diverse life experiences and they will acquire competencies at different ages. This is the reason why the [Committee on the Rights of the Child](#) has sought information on minimum legal ages for legal and medical [counselling](#) or medical treatment without parental consent, creating and joining associations, and participating in administrative and judicial proceedings when it developed the guidelines relating to Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Brando, 2020).

According to Wikipedia, the [Canadian International Development Agency](#) reports that there are three primary points to consider regarding evolving capacities:

- evolving capacities should be understood in the context of where children grow;
- evolving capacities should grow out of respect for the competencies young people already have, and;
- adults should protect young people from experiences and decisions they have not yet acquired the capacity to take responsibility for.

Interactive-participatory method is a way of providing pupils with the ability to influence some of the things that affect them, learn new skills, have fun, and develop a closer connection to their community and at the same time help adults understand children's issues through their lens (Aileen, 2000). The process of participation helps in acquiring different skills and strengthens capacities. Through participation, children are empowered to take greater responsibility as they gain confidence and competence in the acquisition of skills. Therefore, providing children with interaction, participation, intellectual and environmental stimulation, opportunities to play and interact socially foster cognitive, affective and psychomotor skills acquisition in children if employed by teachers in the class.

Moreover, according to Rogoff (2011), he opined that children serve a sort of apprenticeship in thinking through interactive-participation which he refers to as guided participation in social and cultural activities. Guided participation occurs when adults and children share activities. Parents could also broaden or limit children's opportunities through their decisions about how much and when to expose children to books, television and child-care. They may give children opportunities to learn about cultural traditions and practices through routines and play. For instance, in Zimbabwe as well as in Nigeria, children play numerous games such as hide and seek, guessing games, complex sand drawing games, imaginative games representing local work and family routines, skill games like jacks and a rule game requiring considerable strategic planning and numerical calculations and constructing models of wire or clay.

Rogoff (2003) further stressed that children adopt values, skills and mannerisms by simply watching and listening to peers and adults, this is called learning by osmosis. Guided interactive- participation is widely used around the world, but cultures may differ in the goals of development- what content is to be learnt and the means

of providing guided participation (Rogoff, 2007). Around the world, caregivers arrange children's activities and revise children's responsibilities as they gain skill and knowledge. With guidance, children participate in cultural activities that socialize them into skilled activities. In Guatemala as a country, Mayan mothers help their daughters learn to weave through guided participation. Throughout the world, learning occurs, not just by studying or by attending classes but also through interaction with knowledgeable persons. Steinert and Snell (1999) stated that the use of interactive techniques and strategies help the pupils to become more engaged in learning and retain more information, thus giving them satisfaction.

Evolving capacities as an enabling principle in article 5 draws on the concept of "evolving capacities" to refer to processes of maturation and learning whereby children progressively acquire knowledge, competencies and understanding, including acquiring understanding about their rights and about how they can best be realized. (Varadan, 2019). Rogoff, Correa-Chavez, and Silva (2011) in their study on cultural variations in children's attention and learning through interactive-participation in a wide variety of family and community activities revealed that in the United States, children's out-of-school times provide limited opportunities to learn by observing and participating in a variety of valued family and community activities. Involving children in meaningful community activities helped them to better understand valued work and other activities in their culture.

Gratien, Adriam and Bartha (2019), in a study on a tale of two capacities including children and decisionally vulnerable adults in biomedical research argued that the best interests is to develop a guiding principle for representatives of individuals who lack legal capacity to make decisions on their own, for children, it is the primary criterion for courts, health care providers, and parents, though the latter are typically extended substantial discretion to decide what is best for the child. He further opined that a child's best interests may be broken down into a hierarchy including individual medical benefit, familial medical benefit (which could indirectly benefit the child), and benefitting other paediatrics patients and that the most difficult aspect for parents is to balance the best interests and evolving capacity of children to make their own decisions.

Varadan (2019) in a study the principle of evolving capacities under the UN convention on the rights of the child What then is the role and function of "evolving capacities" within the framework of the UNCRC? concluded that a child's capacity, or perceived lack thereof, will undoubtedly play a role in the child being able to secure the enjoyment of rights under international law and that children have historically been defined by their vulnerability, and generally presumed to be incompetent under the law. He further claimed that studies however, amongst others, has convincingly shown that even at a very young age, children are able to express agency and autonomy over their lives, and are often capable of decision-making much earlier than the legally prescribed age of competency (Alderson, 1990; Alderson, 1993; Alderson, 1996 in Varadan 2019). Yet, the capacity of children continues to be undervalued and overlooked in all areas of life (Freeman, 2007; Tobin, 2013 in Varadan, 2019).

Ojo (2016), in a study where lower primary school pupils were engaged in Basic science learning through the use of interactive-participatory (a method adopted in evolving capacity of children) and mind-mapping instructional strategies revealed the effectiveness of interactive-participatory instructional compared to mind-mapping instructional strategy in developing the cognitive, psychomotor and attitudes of primary school pupils in Basic science. This study allowed primary school pupils to be taught without considering some other factors that underpin evolving capacities of children, ranging from considering their rights, choice, opinion and interest. It only showed the effectiveness of one of the methods used in the evolving the capacities of children. This study is also limited to lower primary school level, the convention of rights of the child expects the capacities of the children to evolve as early as possible, meaning that evolving capacities can take place among pre-primary school learners. Evolving capacity could be seen as a strategy that can support teacher in determining how learners' capacities evolve over time and develop necessary interventions and responses to meaningfully address individual children's right to development. Little or nothing have been done in Nigeria in terms of the practicability, adaptability and domestication of the concept, hence the need for this study.

A PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF EVOLVING CAPACITY OF A CHILD: A CASE STUDY OF PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN (MULTIAGE CLASS OF 3-5YEARS) IN PORTUGAL

A. Celebration of 2024 Mother's Day in Portugal

Step 1: Teacher informs the children about the coming of the Mother's Day celebration. She asks each child

some questions about their mothers. The questions are (but not limited to):

Mention the name of your mother?

Why is she special to you?

What does she do for you everyday?

Step 2: The teacher asks each of the children what could be done for mothers to celebrate them. The children gave different suggestions and agreed presenting their mothers with their pictures drawn by them. So, the task began.

Step 3: Each of them was given a plain sheet to draw their mothers and colour as appropriate. They are allowed to pick the colour of their choice.

Collaboration by the school

Step 4: These pictures were printed and put on a big board in the class with the names of the child under the pictures. This is done by the school.

Step 5: The school printed the pictures on a foamy material that makes it looks like teddy and were kept in the classroom for sight seeing.

Step 6: The school printed each picture on a key holder and the key holders were designed by the teachers and the children. Each child is called upon to come and pick the colour of bead he or she would like to use in designing the key holder while the teacher helps them in fixing the beads to the key holders. The children were happy to see their handiwork through the choice they made, their rights and interests were sought and promoted. There was this partnership and collaborative work between the teachers and the children.

B. Visitation to old and aged people

Children were allowed to sit round while the teacher ask them some of the following questions:

1. Who has a grandma or grandpa at home?
2. How are they to you?
3. What are the things they do for young children?
4. Who can say something about his or her grandma?
5. Is there any need for them to be celebrated by going to old people to greet them?
6. What can you do or give to them?

It was agreed upon to make a drawing of coloured beautiful paintings for them.

Step 1: The teacher provided a big long white thick paper for the children

Step 2: Each of them was making his or her painting giving chance for others too. The painting was done by all of them on a single sheet. Each draw what he or she likes and paint as desired.

Step3:The painting was taken to the aged people, they sang for them and presented to them.

There are many projects that can be worked upon in the classroom based on the available resources which can allow for children capacities to evolve gradually at the same time taking into consideration the interest, choice and rights of the children.

IMPLICATIONS ON THE NIGERIA'S PRE-PRIMARY CLASSROOM PRACTICES

- The teacher and or the helpers did not laugh at whatever the child draws but different types of colouring devices were provided for them to work with.
- The children worked together in joy, happiness, they take turns and accept each other's opinions on issues discussed.
- Children on their own learn how to agree to go with a particular suggestion without quarrelling or disagreeing. Repeated activities helped them to speak up and accept other people's opinion.
- This method made use of collaboration, interaction, active participation, openness, honesty with the teacher as a mere guide in helping the children achieve their goals, thereby making their capacities to evolve as teaching learning progresses.

- Children made unimaginable brilliant but relevant and useful suggestions in making the project come out fine.
- This is making the right of the child work as well as making the voice of the child heard and count.

PICTURES: THE PROCCESS



SCHOOLAND PARENTS COLLABORATION AS A SUCCESS

Parents especially mothers made the collaboration work a lot. Mothers came around to see their pictures displayed and the key holders were presented by each child to his or mother on the mothers' day. The school provided fund to provide the materials needed for the board where the pictures were printed, the foam productions and also the key holders. The beads and other accessories were picked by each child and assisted by the teachers in finishing or coupling it.

Parents accepted the key holders with joy and the type of pictures on it whether it resembles them or not. The old people visited by the children were happy and gladly collect the drawings from the children. The children were happy with the expression of love displayed by the elderly people seeing the paintings presented to them by the children. Children were happy seeing their handiwork being displayed in school and with the elders. They were part of the decision making and they presented what they jointly agreed upon in the classroom and the art works were actively done by them. This involves a lot of funds by the school.

The questions are:

- i. How many private schools in Nigeria are ready for this let alone the public schools?
- ii. How many Parents or mothers would create time to visit school for programmes like this every

term? Parents visit schools to come and assist their children in completing tasks like drawing or painting given to their children as directed by the school.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that teachers should not only read or memorise the rights of the child but should also put into practice in the classroom and also make children's capacity regardless of their ages, exposures, backgrounds to evolve in learning new things through participation and collaboration.

SUGGESTIONS

- Teachers are encouraged to demonstrate the act of the rights of the child by making them to be part of decision making especially on things that affect children in the classroom.
- They should read and learn about evolving the capacity of children as it touches the rights of the child by making them do things on their own while the teacher collaborates with them in making it a success.
- Teachers should also embark on different projects using different scenarios or events that could facilitate learning. School owners are encouraged to fund such projects and supervise teachers while embarking on such projects.
- Parents are also encouraged to be part of their children's learning by regular visits to schools and not only on open-days.
- Government should also fund public schools so that projects that involve fund could be planned and effectively executed.

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