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Hearing class captains' voices: Unleashing leadership potential through the change laboratory and expansive learning methods

Jacobina Taukondjele Nehunga  and Farhana Amod Kajee 

Faculty of Education, Department of Secondary and Post School Education, Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa
fkajee@sun.ac.za

Abstract

In the Education Act 16 of 2001, the Namibian Ministry of Education makes provision for secondary learners to participate in decision-making. The Education Act specifically mandates that “every state secondary school must establish a body for learners to take part in school leadership” (Republic of Namibia, 2001:s. 60(1)). This provision is reinforced by the revised Education Act 3 of 2020, which stipulates that “schools must create appropriate spaces, platforms and an environment where learners meaningfully participate in school governance” (Republic of Namibia, 2020:s. 16(1)). Although learner leadership is broadly advocated, research shows that students are often excluded from genuine democratic participation and instead occupy tokenistic managerial roles. Class captainship is a prevalent form of learner leadership in Namibian and South African schools, yet it is largely unsupported by policy and underexplored in the literature. Despite its widespread practice, class captainship lacks formal recognition and guidance, limiting its potential to foster meaningful leadership and democratic engagement. This gap underscores the need for further research into class captainship as a legitimate form of learner leadership. Working from a critical premise and informed by the work of Engeström, in this article we draw from 2 theoretical constructs particularly relevant to this study, namely the change laboratory workshop (CLW) method and the expansive learning cycle. While CLWs provide a learning platform coupled with stimulus to activate participants' understanding, the expansive learning cycle stimulates participants to begin expansive learning processes to improve the practice of class captainship. Moreover, expansive learning processes enable the development of generative solutions to problems identified during these workshops. Challenges such as a lack of support, policy frameworks, guiding documents, induction programmes, and training hinder the effective implementation of class captainship. In response, we initiated several school-based interventions, including the development of a guiding document, the facilitation of a workshop for class captains, and the introduction of annual election campaigns. The findings inform policymakers, school leaders, and education programme designers in developing formal policies and capacity-building initiatives to recognise and strengthen class captainship, particularly in Namibian and South African schools. Data were generated using a formative change laboratory method and analysed through inductive and abductive approaches within the framework of the cultural historical activity theory (CHAT). Inductive analysis of qualitative data from CLWs enabled the identification of themes and multiple perspectives, while abductive analysis offered contextually relevant theoretical insight (Van Hulst & Visser, 2025). We used CHAT as the primary theoretical lens to interpret the system of class captainship.

Keywords: change laboratory method; class captains; expansive learning; learner leadership development

Introduction and Background

Many African countries, for example, South Africa and Namibia, have emerged from historical colonialism where their education system functioned along racial lines and prejudices (Pomuti & Weber, 2012). The legacy of colonial education in Namibia and South Africa has shaped school leadership by entrenching inequality and limiting democratic participation (Hutchison, 2021). Restrictive policies curtailed access to education, impeding overall development and excluding learners from meaningful leadership roles (Grant & Kajee, 2020). This marginalisation has contributed to challenges, such as increased disciplinary issues, a lack of support, and high drop-out rates, ultimately undermining effective school leadership.

In Namibia, the system of apartheid continued even after independence, posing numerous challenges to the education system in general and school leadership in particular. Post-colonial reforms in Namibia were aimed at redressing educational inequality by promoting democracy and participation in schools (Ministry of Education and Culture [MOEC], 1993; Republic of Namibia, 1990). Policies such as *Toward Education for All* and the Education Act 16 of 2001 (Republic of Namibia, 2001) emphasise inclusive decision-making, including the role of secondary learners. Democratic participation, as described by A Harris (2003) and Shekupakela-Nelulu (2008), involves shared leadership across all levels. In this article we focus on class captains as learner leaders who manage classroom dynamics but remain largely unrecognised in formal policy (Kalimbo, 2018; Nehunga, 2020). There is evidence of a disjuncture between policy imperatives pertaining to democratic participation and practice. For example, Namibian scholars (Kalimbo, 2018; Nehunga, 2020) observed a managerial leadership approach that promotes strict control, which hinders the democratic participation of learners. Managerial leadership follows a top-down approach, emphasising authority and hierarchical control. In contrast, we advocate for democratic leadership, which values inclusive participation and amplifies diverse voices regardless of formal position. Similarly, Shields (2006:63) posits that a “managerial approach to education leadership has hindered the creation of spaces in which all children may bring the totality of their lived experience to the educational experiences of schooling.” The absence of children's voices in school matters, especially in the Namibian education context, resulted in various challenges such as high school dropout, high failure rates

caused by the feeling of alienation and a lack of ownership (Grant, 2015) among stakeholders, especially learners (class captains).

In response, Kajee's (2021) appeal for educational leaders to align with a "critical premise" to address systemic issues that may have originated during the colonial era and reform the ways that schools in Namibia, South Africa, and other countries currently employ school leadership. Aligning with Kajee's sentiments, we take a critical stance to address the hindering factors within class captainship practice and foreground transformation to develop leadership among class captains. We draw on an interventionist master's study conducted on the development of class captains' voices and leadership. We also respond to Grant's (2015) question on how schools can involve learners, particularly class captains, in the introduction and implementation of school reforms. We argue that engaging class captains in CLWs enable them to develop a deeper understanding of their roles and to strengthen their voices and leadership capacities.

The study reported on here is relevant in the African and international context because it offers a methodology for improving school leadership practices, particularly learner leadership, which is a provocative agenda of our time. It also contributes to the knowledge base of educational leadership and management as a field of study, benefiting both the African and international contexts. The interventionist nature of this study aligns with global trends in participatory research, where outcomes are not predetermined but emerge collaboratively through processes like CLWs. This approach highlights the potential of generative, context-specific solutions. Future research could apply similar interventionist methods, such as CLWs and expansive learning cycles, to explore and enhance educational practices in other contexts.

Informed by transformative leadership theories and drawn from Engeström and Sannino's work on the change laboratory and expansive learning cycle methods (Engeström, 2016; Sannino, 2011), we aimed to answer the overarching research question: How do the change laboratory and expansive learning cycle methods contribute to the development of voice and leadership among class captains? From a transformative perspective, which begins by questioning existing norms, transformative leadership has the potential to reshape class captainship, strengthening the leadership capacity and voice of class captains.

In the next section the literature on transformative leadership, which informs this article, is discussed.

Transformative Leadership

Most of the deep-rooted challenges emerging from our colonial education history pertaining to educational leadership in the Namibian and South African education context need to be addressed to improve leadership practices in schools. The starting point is to adopt a contemporary construct of leadership, such as transformative leadership, that recognises the complex social and political context in which the education systems are embedded (Neylon & O'Donoghue, 2021). Unlike traditional leadership models that emphasise individual analysis, transformative leadership centres on collective agency and begins with questions of social justice and democracy. It situates education and leadership within their broader social context (Grant & Kajee, 2019). In Namibian master's studies on school leadership, transformative leadership has been shown to enhance the voice and leadership capacities of learners, teachers, and parents (Nehunga, 2020; Nghiteeka, 2020; Shilongo, 2020; Shipopyeni, 2020).

CLWs provide a platform for a relational, collaborative participatory process to begin with those faced with certain challenges to bring change and transformation, especially class captains. Class captains as learner leaders in collaboration with other school leaders could begin to question their current leadership practice to learn about the enabling and constraining factors in a democratic setting. The questioning and analysis could result in innovative solutions such as formal recognition of class captainship, informing policymakers in the Namibian and South African education systems. Formal recognition of class captains as learner leaders would eventually contribute to development of their voice and leadership. Grant (2015) indicates that there is a need to do research on the development of learner leadership. Addressing a gap in learner leadership in Namibian schools, we advocate for the development of class captains' voice and leadership (Grant, 2015). Although class captainship is widely practised, it remains undocumented and lacks formal recognition in policies (Kalimbo, 2018; Nehunga, 2020). Internationally, Rudduck and Flutter (2000) highlight how learners are often marginalised in school leadership, an insight echoed in the Namibian context, where class captains are largely excluded from decision-making processes. This situation poses a serious challenge to the overall school leadership since their inclusion as learner leaders at classroom level could provide many ways in which the school management and other leaders could learn from them in schools.

In creating a genuine and inclusive school atmosphere, transformative leaders should work

courageously from within their school and exercise effective oppositional power to bring change and transformation (Shields, 2009). This suggests that, although class captains are not formally recognised, their collaboration with formally recognised learner leaders such as learner representative councils has the potential to strengthen and enhance overall school leadership practice. The development of learner voice and leadership, which are central constructs within the transformative leadership framework, is of particular interest and is discussed in the following section.

Development of Learner Voice and Leadership

The concept “learner voice” is central to this study. Literature defines learner voice as “the opportunities learners have to speak about what matters to them in schools and the degree to which they are engaged in school-level decision-making processes” (Grant & Kajee, 2019:90). It is also understood from Mitra’s view as “the opportunities that learners may be afforded to share in school decisions that will shape their lives and the lives of others” (2004:651). Developing learner voice and leadership among learners, especially class captains, prepares them for social interaction within their school and more broadly, in society (Mitra & Gross, 2009).

The Central Theoretical Ideas and Concepts

In exploring the development of voice and leadership among class captains, we draw on the cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 2016; Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). CHAT provides a suitable theoretical framework as it facilitates critical reflection on past, present, and anticipated practices (Foot, 2014), offering a nuanced understanding of class captainship within its broader cultural, political, economic, and contextual dimensions. The theory’s transformative orientation supports participant-driven change through practice and activism, contributing to improvement of school leadership. Central to this study are two CHAT constructs: the CLW method and the expansive learning cycle.

A CLW is a formative intervention method and a living toolkit (Virkkunen & Newnham,

2013). Being a toolkit means that it captures actions and processes as participants (class captains) learn expansively in a collective way about their situation. Moreover, it is a formative method which offers purposeful actions within a situation to bring about transformation or change (Ploettner & Tresseras, 2016). This means that participants (class captains) are provoked to question, analyse and examine their leadership practice that would ultimately bring transformation in the current state and the practice of future class captainship in schools. Of special interest for this article were the purposeful actions of class captains and other leaders in the school to evaluate and analyse the current class captainship practice and bring about change where necessary. One starting point, as informed by CHAT, was to trace this activity’s history and culture to map for the future. The evaluation and analysis helped participants identify hindering factors and to try to work out ways to resolve these factors to strengthen the practice. It is imperative to keep in mind that analysis and evaluation actions took place in the CLW sessions, in which participants started to learn expansively, not following a linear way, but generating solutions from their collective engagement.

Learning expansively implies “the multidirectional movement of learners [class captains] constructing and implementing a new, wider and more complex object for their activity, which ultimately leads to qualitative transformation, both at the level of individual actions and at the level of the collective activity and broader contexts” (Sannino, Engeström & Lemos, 2016:603). To simplify this notion of expansive learning, class captains are presented with conceptual tools such as the second-generation activity system model and expansive learning cycle (Baldwin, 2020) to facilitate the process leading to the understanding of factors hindering and enabling their leadership practice and the development of new ways to improve the practice of class captainship. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the second-generation triangular model and the expansive learning cycle that facilitated the expansive learning process among class captains in the CLW sessions.

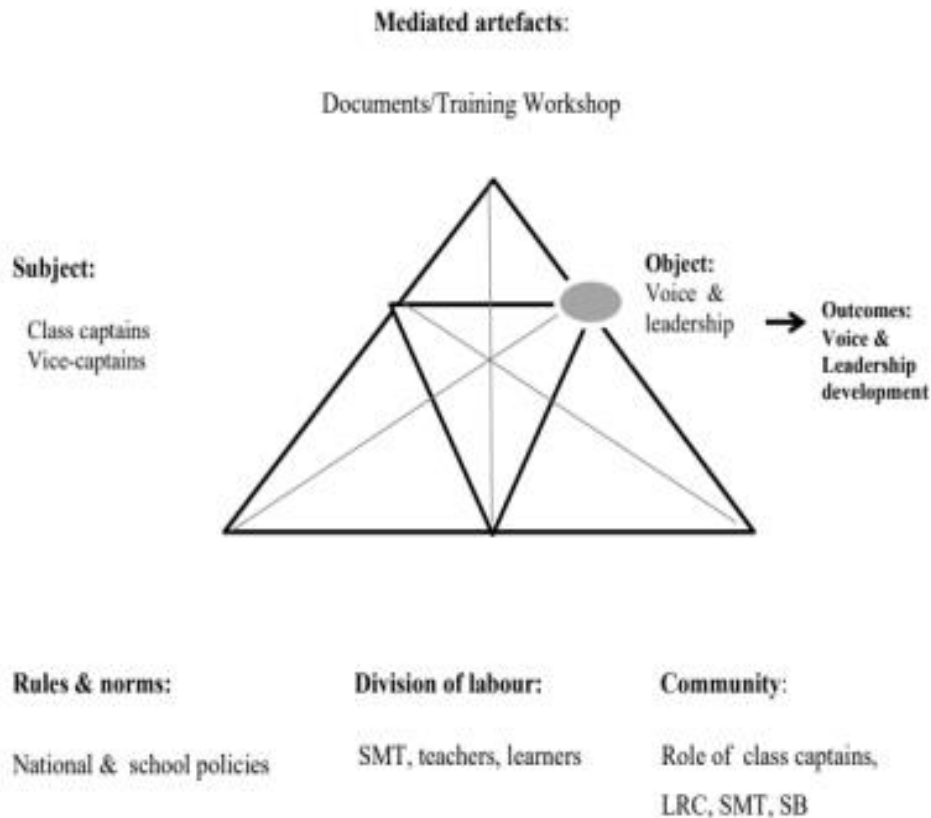


Figure 1 Second-generation activity system model for class captainship (Nehunga, 2020 adapted from Baldwin, 2020)

Figure 1 depicts the elements of the second-generation activity system and how class captains are positioned within their school, which may enable or constrain their leadership development. The subjects refer to the class captains and vice class captains themselves taking action, which entails division of labour (sharing responsibility such as planning of events, chairing meetings, helping to conduct prayers or sending out invitations, among themselves) in envisaging their main object, which is the development of their voice and leadership as learner leaders. The mediated artefacts (immediate physical or social support) refer to the social others and artefacts. Social others may include other learner leaders or any other adults with leadership experience within their school who may provide support to the class captains as they are moving towards achieving their objective. Artefacts may include the physical structures such as school mottos and the vision and mission statement of the school, which may also help to develop voice and leadership.

Furthermore, the community includes the school management team (SMT), other learner leaders such as those on learner representative councils, class teachers, school board members and the broader school community within which class captains exercise their voice and leadership. The

interaction of class captains with other equally important school leaders could contribute to the development of voice and leadership. The activity system of class captains includes rules and norms, another element which implies formal or informal regulations such as the Education Act 3 of 2020 (recently amended from 2016) and school rules or policies that may enable or hinder the object of the class captains system (development of voice and leadership). The Namibian Education Act specifies that “schools must create appropriate spaces, platforms and an environment where learners [class captains] meaningfully participate in school governance” (Republic of Namibia, 2020:s. 16(1)).

While Figure 1 shows the position of class captains as individual and overall school leaders, Figure 2 shows the stages of learning that took place within the class captain’s activity system, as class captains (subject) began learning expansively about their leadership practice considering both enabling and constraining factors (because of the elements of the activity system indicated in Figure 1).

Expansive learning begins when participants collectively question and articulate a shared problem (Stage 1). A second stimulus, the activity system model, is then introduced to scaffold their understanding of the broader historical, cultural,

and social factors involved, often revealing underlying contradictions (Stage 2). This is followed by collaborative analysis and the generation of innovative solutions (Stage 3),

culminating in the development and testing of a more robust resolution through experimentation, piloting, or implementation (Stages 4–7) (Winberg, Garraway & Wright, 2023).

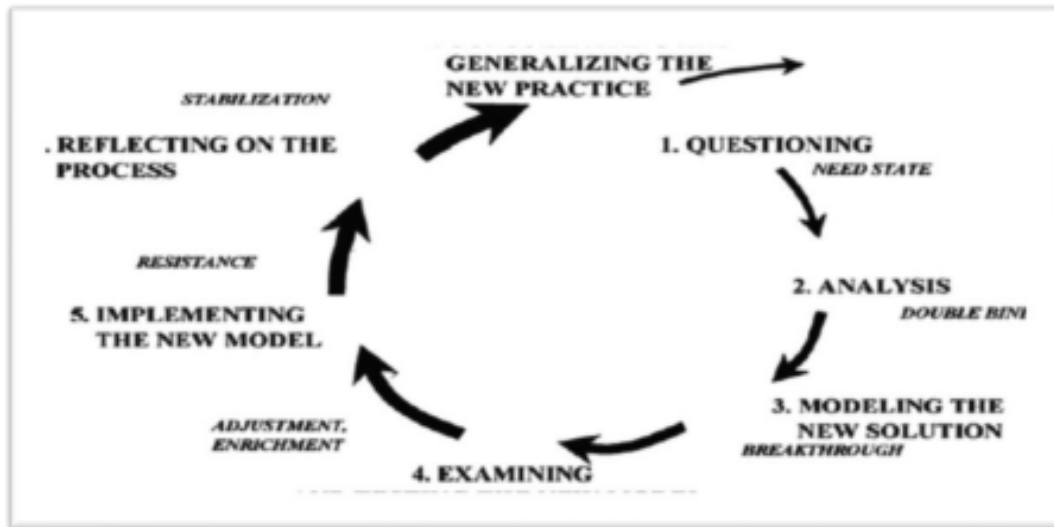


Figure 2 Learning actions in the expansive learning cycle (Nehunga, 2020 adapted from Engeström, 2015)

In response to the research question, How do the change laboratory and expansive learning cycle methods contribute to the development of voice and leadership among class captains?, we employed a critical-interventionist methodology coupled with a qualitative case study.

Methodology and Methods

Designed as a qualitative case study and taking a critical stance, we draw on an interventionist study on developing voice and leadership among class captains at a combined school in Namibia (Nehunga, 2020). A qualitative design enabled an in-depth exploration of class captainship, a prevalent yet often unrecognised leadership practice. Emphasising participants' narratives over numerical data, the critical-interventionist stance allowed for both the analysis of cultural, historical, and structural influences and the conceptual framing needed to support transformative change.

The study was conducted in a rural combined school in Namibia. As Ngcobo and Tikly (2010) observe, rural contexts are often shaped by entrenched traditional norms, beliefs, and values that can influence the development of voice and leadership of the youth, including class captains. Building on this perspective, we argue that while class captainship is a longstanding practice in Namibian and South African schools, there is a pressing need to address the challenges that these learner leaders face to strengthen and legitimise their role. For this study, it was vital to critically analyse the local values, perceptions and realities and the history of how class captainship has been

practised to bring about the necessary changes to the practice.

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the institution where this study was registered. All ethical protocols, such as confidentiality, informed consent and the use of pseudonyms, were strictly adhered to. Research participants were class captains as primary participants, and other groups of participants included members of the SMT, school board, learner representative council and register class teachers, who provided input on class captainship practices at the school where the study was conducted. Purposive sampling was used; this translates to "particular settings, persons or events [being] deliberately selected for the important information they can provide, that cannot be accessed from other choices" (Maxwell, 2008:235). All participants were deliberately selected for their direct involvement with class captains and their informed perspectives relevant to the study. The data generation process took place in two phases. The first phase, contextual profiling, was aimed at surfacing current class captainship practices at the relevant school. Data were generated through individual and focus group interviews, document analysis, and participatory methods such as transect walks and mapping. Interviews presented participants' perspectives on class captainship, while document analysis provided insight from school records. The participatory methods enabled participants to actively engage with and reflect on factors that influence their practice.

With the second interventionist phase we aimed to transform class captainship practices,

building directly on insight from the contextual profiling in phase one. Key issues identified, such as the lack of formal recognition and absence of guiding documents, among others, prompted participants to collaboratively develop resolutions, including the creation of a school-based guideline to strengthen the practice. For this article, special attention is given to the data generated in the second phase (interventional phase through CLWs) within which an expansive learning cycle was embedded. During CLWs, participants were presented with the CHAT model as well as the expansive learning cycle as stimuli to provoke them to think deeply about the practice of class captainship. Their actions, analyses and critiques during CLWs elicited responses to the question: How do the change laboratory and expansive learning cycle methods contribute to the development of voice and leadership among class captains? Six CLWs were conducted in the study, and data were analysed through inductive and abductive analysis. Inductive analysis was used to generate themes and categories directly from the data, while abductive reasoning provided theoretically grounded explanations to interpret and make sense of the findings.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

In this section we address the overarching research question: How do the change laboratory and expansive learning cycle methods contribute to developing voice and leadership among class captains? Exploring this question contributes to the field of educational leadership and management by advancing understanding of learner leadership, an important yet under-researched area.

Firstly, a brief overview of the findings generated during the contextual profiling phase (phase one) of this intervention study is presented. Findings for phase one reveal how the concept of learner voice and leadership was understood, considering the enabling and constraining factors to the leadership practice of class captains at the specific school. Findings from the first phase were necessary to inform the second phase, which was the interventional phase aimed at bringing about transformation in school leadership, particularly class captainship, through developing their voice and leadership.

Secondly, findings from all CLWs conducted are presented following the learning stages of the expansive learning cycle. This is because the expansive learning cycle offers both a theoretical and conceptual (Englund & Price, 2018) understanding of all expansive learning processes that emerged in the CLWs. Lastly, findings on the skills, attitudes and knowledge identified as aspects of the development of voice and leadership among class captains are discussed. Table 1 presents the structured thematic coding system used in the

study, illustrating data sources and codes used to refer to participant's responses.

Table 1 CLWs' data coding system (Nehunga, 2020)

Respondents	Codes
Principal	CLP
School board chairperson	CLSB
School management members	CLSMT
Class teachers	CLCT
Learner representative council	CLLRC
Class captains	CLCC
Observation	CLO

Pre-modelling of the Contextual Profiling Findings

The primary aim of the contextual profiling phase was to establish how the concept of learner voice and leadership was understood. It was imperative to understand the challenges surrounding class captainship, considering the enabling and constraining factors (as identified by the learners – see Table 2) to improve the practice.

Table 2 Problem areas and challenges (Nehunga, 2020)

Problem areas and challenges on class captainship identified at the school under study:
1) Insecurity and confidentiality issues were of concern
2) Culture of ill-discipline among learners in the school
3) Lack of supporting documents and motivation for the practice of class captainship
4) Leadership of the learner representative council overshadows class captainship
5) No formal structure of class captains at school
6) Lack of understanding of the concept of learner voice and learner leadership among participants
7) No formal elections of class captains at school

The identified challenges were categorised into cultural norms (e.g., Problems 1 and 2) and systemic gaps (e.g., Problems 3 to 7). CHAT was employed to analyse these cultural norms and systemic gaps, offering a theoretical framework to interpret the findings.

In response to problem areas 3 and 6 (see Table 2), the principal said: *“These are real problems, the document or duty sheets of class captains should be developed. They need also training or workshops and support from the school management”* (CLP). Similarly, one SMT member expressed that *“we need to understand the roles of these learners at the school”* (CLSMT2). She further expressed that *“I think the school management ... somehow needs the education to understand leadership ... I think we need a school-based induction programme for these learners”* (CLSMT2).

The problem areas and challenges identified above presented and triggered a critical task for participants (Osberg, Pope & Galloway, 2006) to work out potential solutions to improve the leadership of class captains. For this study,

participants were not expected to think of quick-fix solutions; however, to develop expansive solutions through collaboration and collective efforts, thereby learning something novel (Sannino et al., 2016). In the next section, the findings followed by the stages of the expansive learning cycle are discussed.

Expansive Learning Cycle: The Questioning and Analysis Stage

During the stages of expansive learning, participants engaged in criticising and rejecting some aspects of current practices (class captainship) and existing wisdom. This required of the participants to engage in conversations and discussions to work out practical transformation (Engeström & Sannino, 2010) towards developing the voice and leadership of class captains. Presented with the problem areas and challenges (as identified previously), participants began working on several strategies towards a deeper understanding and resolution of the hindering factors to the leadership practice of class captains. The following provides evidence of how these two stages of expansive learning transpired:

I think disrespect of class captains, bullying, insulting and beating of class captains are caused by poor discipline among learners in the school. Although the school rules state clearly that they should be respected, learners are continuing to bully, insult or beat them. Like beating is even motivated by the fact some learners think that young class captains cannot lead them. It is also clear that class captains are not safe to exercise their leadership in the school environment which is not safe for them. It is even better with learner representative council members who are more respected than class captains. The other thing is that class captains sometimes do not have a clear direction of what is expected from them. (CLCT)

The questioning and analysis stages started when participants began questioning some of the hindering factors to the practice of class captainship. It is imperative at this stage to confirm that our quest was not only to be aware of the hindering factors but also to bring about transformation, thereby developing class captains' voice and leadership, which are essential for effective school leadership. Apart from the hindering factors identified, other problem areas stemming from the culture and history of how class captainship has been practised emerged through discussions in the CLWs. One participant said: *"It is a taboo for children to have a discussion with adults, thus in most cases, children do not form part of the adults' discussions"* (CLP). Another participant expressed that *"adults could beat children for any wrongdoings as a means of punishment"* (CLCC). Considering the participants' opinions, the cultural norms, beliefs (Osberg et al., 2006) and our colonial history also affected the leadership practices, particularly those of class

captains, in schools. This was captured with the adoption of CHAT as a theoretical lens to make sense of the data.

Furthermore, participants indicated a lack of support for the practice of class captainship, as no guiding documents, policies, induction programmes, training, or workshops were available to class captains to prepare them for their leadership roles. This indicates a systemic gap in the Namibian education system that needs to be addressed to enhance the practice of class captainship. One participant said: *"We do not know really what is expected from us"* (CLCC). Archard (2013:337) advocates "a type of leadership education which is concerned with learners learning how to be as opposed to being taught." This means that participants are left with the task of designing and evaluating a leadership practice appropriate to class captains in their school. This is the platform provided by the change laboratory method to invoke the voices of participants as they are co-constructors and collaborators (Archard, 2013) of leadership transformation.

Expansive Learning Cycle: Modelling and Examining Stages

These learning stages necessitate participants modelling a possible new structure of class captains and operating or experimenting with the new model to fully grasp its dynamics, potential, and limitations (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). During an informal discussion in a CLW, participants indicated that *"we need to organise the class captains' workshop to know our roles better"* (CLCC4). Another participant also indicated that *"we should organise a day to sit with the principal and our teachers to draft a school-based guiding document for class captains"* (CLCC8). Moreover, participants argued for a class captains' club, saying that *"[t]he most important thing also is to start working together; therefore, I suggest for a class captains' club"* (CLCC5). This point was supported by another participant's suggestion: *"What about the class captainship yearly election campaign at the school, just like for LRCs? I think this way we will also be recognised like them"* (CLCC5). The findings demonstrate that class captains modelled solutions to improve their leadership practice while developing their voice and leadership.

Examining as an expansive learning stage was observed when participants proposed to conduct a school-based class captain's workshop. *"While we are waiting for the feedback, we should think of informing the principal about our intentions, drafting the programme for the day as well as inviting, for example, the LRC, our peer leaders, to our workshop"* (CLCC3). Another participant said: *"you just mentioned drafting of the programme, I think we should also volunteer to conduct some*

items in our programme, for example, who is the chairperson, prayer conductor, welcoming remarks, etc. Two class captains should also volunteer to go and inform the principal about our intentions” (CLCC6). The findings reveal what is termed as invoking learner voices and developing leadership (Grant, 2015).

Apart from the discussions and conversations that transpired in the CLWs, class captains could exercise their voice and leadership when they decided to run a class captain leadership workshop at their school. At the workshop they suggested that a school-based guiding document for class captains should be drafted. Moreover, they proposed the establishment of a class captains’ club, a yearly election campaign for class captains as well as an induction programme and identification. All these proposals were novel resolutions to the leadership practice of class captains and would mean an improvement in the current and future structure of class captains’ leadership.

The Contribution of CLWs in the Development of Class Captains’ Voice and Leadership

Various scholars who conducted interventionist studies in Namibian schools (see, for example, Amadhila, 2018; Kalimbo, 2018; Vaino, 2018) support the use of a change laboratory method to improve school leadership practices. Their findings reveal that the method may trigger participants’ agency to begin learning expansively about overall school leadership. For this article, class captains, alongside other school leaders, were triggered to learn expansively about their leadership practice, thereby developing their voice and leadership.

The development of class captains’ voice and leadership was observed through the skills, attitudes and knowledge that they acquired through a collective and collaborative process of expansive learning. However, the development of attitudes was more observable.

Boosted self-assurance among class captains

Through the change laboratory method, confidence emerged among class captains as one attribute of leadership development. During an informal discussion, one participant indicated: “*My legs usually ‘tremble’ whenever I stand in front of people, right now I feel confident because of the CLWs I have attended*” (CLLRC). Another participant expressed that “*confidence makes us critical thinkers able to solve problems in our school, as well as in our community*” (CLCC). Building confidence among participants may become a driving force for school leadership improvement and overall school management (Bush, 2007). As advocated by Smyth (2006), our agenda as leaders at all levels is to produce capable citizens able to improve their own lives and those of others, which requires confidence.

Fostered authenticity, empowered learner voices, and cultivated teamwork

The change laboratory method developed a sense of truth and honesty in participants. A class captain expressed: “*We do not fear anymore to stand up for the truth*” (CLCC). Whitehead (2009) argues that authentic leaders seek improvement and the welfare of others. He further highlights that good leaders produce outcomes that are healthy for society.

Learner’s voice was observed when class captains took part in the decision-making process of the school, which was evident in most CLWs. They started to collaborate with other leaders to work out a resolution to their leadership practice. The concept of being heard (Mitra & Gross, 2009) was observed when class captains spoke about what mattered to them in improving their leadership practice. This was also evident when participants said: “*We are free to speak out about what mattered to us in our school*” (CLCC).

Teamwork also emerged as class captains were seen dividing roles and duties among themselves. One class captain expressed that “[i]f we want to make our workshop a success we should be willing to work together as a team” (CLCC). During a school-based leadership workshop, class captains were seen working as a team during all phases of the preparation, organisation, and implementation.

The cultivation of innovative skills and fostering of commitment

As was evident from the change laboratory, leadership attributes such as initiative and commitment, have developed. Class captains were engaged in conversations and discussions that resulted in solutions to the problems and challenges that they were experiencing as learner leaders. They contributed good ideas to the transformation of their leadership practice. As emphasised in the literature, initiative is one element of leadership that helps leaders to make informed decisions. As argued, the initiative requires new ideas to be formulated and an imaginative outlook promoting change, as opposed to simply maintaining the status quo (Harris, A & Lambert, 2003; Harris, R & Haydn, 2006).

During all the CLWs, the leadership attribute of commitment was observed. This is captured in the next excerpt: “*Two heads are better than one. We should be willing to bring our ideas forward to contribute to the change effort we are all aiming for. We should also respect other people’s opinions and participate without fear*” (CLCC). Being eager to complete the learning process and being punctual for all CLW sessions conducted, showed commitment. Whitehead (2009:847) argues that “leadership is a complex moral relationship between people, based on trust obligation, commitment, emotion and shared vision of the

good.” The notion put forward by Whitehead emphasises the importance of commitment in achieving intended purposes, such as improvement in school leadership.

Enhanced interpersonal relationship and behaviour
Being an interactive method, the CLWs improved the interpersonal relationships among class captains. They indicated that their shyness, which stopped them from communicating with others, had changed, and they had developed good interpersonal relationships. One participant expressed that “*the study made me realise that having good relations with others results in good results in the school*” (CLLRC). This agrees with Grant’s (2008) view that leadership is all about building good relationships with others in a setting such as a school. In this study, class captains contributed to the improvement of school leadership by building relationships with other leaders in their schools.

Conclusion

In conclusion it is imperative to reflect on the primary research question of whether the change laboratory and expansive learning methods contributed to the development of class captains’ voice and leadership. We argue that the method provided a rigorous platform for class captains to start learning expansively about their leadership practice, thus generating novel solutions to inform the current and future class captainship practices in Namibian and South African schools. The argument is grounded in the notion put forward (see Fielding, 2006; Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007) that learner leadership is about learning together, constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively to bring about transformation.

We acknowledge that the change laboratory and expansive learning methods provided the theoretical tools for participants to analyse and lay out the development of voice and leadership among class captains. The most interesting part was the emergence of small cycles within the main expansive learning stages (Engeström, Rantavouri & Kerosuo, 2013, in Engeström, 2016) that further helped participants to find solutions towards improving the leadership practice. We recommend leadership education (Archard, 2013) through methods such as the adoption of CLWs as an approach to better understand the historical factors, cultural norms, and systemic gaps that hinder effective practices.

In conclusion, we acknowledge a significant gap between the current state of school leadership in Namibia and South Africa, particularly about class captainship. We advocate for future research to employ CLWs and the expansive learning cycle as approaches to develop a nuanced methodology

that could enrich the knowledge base in the field of educational leadership and management.

Authors’ Contributions

JN was the student and FK the supervisor. Both authors reviewed the final manuscript.

Notes

- i. This article is based on the master’s thesis of Jacobina Nehunga.
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