

Participatory, Multimodal Approaches to Child Rights Education in Global Contexts: Reflections on a Study with Schoolchildren in Uganda and Canada

Shelley Jones, Kathleen Manion

ABSTRACT Although a child's prerogative to know their rights is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other documents such as the African Charter on Rights and Welfare of the Child, child rights are rarely introduced to children as part of their formal learning experience in school. Children are deemed unable to understand the concepts of rights and responsibilities (Alderson, 2008; Jerome, 2018) and educators do not know how to integrate them into their teaching. This lack of child rights education means children do not possess the awareness and knowledge needed to claim and exercise their rights (Covell et al., 2017; Wabwile, 2016). Drawing on a case study conducted in Uganda and Canada, this paper explores ways that participatory, empowering, multimodal, and contextually responsive approaches to child rights education enables children and their teachers to meaningfully explore and learn about children's rights.

KEYWORDS child rights education; rights and responsibilities; child participation; multimodality; Uganda, Canada

Participatory Approaches and Children's Rights Education

Arguably, more than ever, children need to know their rights and exercise their voice. Current global, national, regional, and local crises (e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic and related health and economic fallout; war and systemic violence; mass migration, refugee encampments, and the climate crisis) expose and exacerbate historical global inequalities and violations of children's rights. This includes, but is not limited to, insufficient food and medical care, susceptibility to maltreatment and child labour, and unequal or insufficient access to education and educational resources (UNICEF, 2020). This is even more challenging for those living in disadvantaged contexts.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989), ratified by every country but the United States, and the more contextually-specific African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (the Charter) (1990) have vital provisions for children's participation in matters that impact them and for education on their rights. While the UNCRC laid the groundwork for children's foundational needs, the African Charter insists that this must be interpreted within the cultural and traditional values of the child (Oluwu, 2002). Article 11(d) of the Charter states that education includes "the preparation of the child

for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, tolerance, dialogue, mutual respect and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, tribal and religious groups.” Article 29(d) of the Convention calls for a similar focus.¹ The interpretation of Article 29(d) was further articulated in General Comment 1 of the Convention that claims Article 29(1) provides a “foundation stone” for human rights education by recognizing that “the rights of the child have not always been given the prominence they require” and encouraging rights education to be “implemented in practice [and be a]... comprehensive, life-long process and start with the reflection of human rights values in the daily life and experiences of children” (2001). Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals further commits the global community to quality universal primary and secondary education (UN, 2022). This is augmented further within Africa by the African Union’s Agenda 2063, which aims to see flourishing human rights, gender equality, inclusion, quality education, and peace by 2063 (AU, 2015). Together these instruments promise human rights education through a comprehensive, life-long process that begins with learning and reflecting upon human rights values in the daily life and experiences of children. As engaged scholars committed to the ideals set out in these documents, we seek to integrate children’s education with community development while also contributing to an academic discourse that advances child rights pedagogy. By partnering with educators in diverse contexts, we have gained deeper and more nuanced perspectives on culturally and geographically different interpretations and actualizations of children’s rights. In this paper we discuss a participatory action research project where we introduced children’s rights education in two distinct global settings – an urban city in Western Canada and a rural area in Southwest Uganda. We worked with classroom teachers to engage children in child rights-based activities and facilitated communication between the children. This paper will discuss our unique insights into participatory processes and cross-global perspectives on children’s rights education.

Background: Implementing the Child Thrive Program in Uganda

To have effective child rights education, we believe it is necessary to include playful, participatory approaches that are engaging, balance rights and responsibilities, and share the democratic principles and citizenship skills of cooperation, critical thinking, tolerance, peaceful resolution, non-discrimination, and respect for human dignity (Friedmann, 2013; Manion & Jones, 2020; Ozturk & Dogan, 2017; UNICEF, 2007). The human rights corpus further promotes the importance of non-discrimination, participation, equality, and empowerment as furthered through legal norms. The Child Thrive program (CTP) was developed and run by the International Institute of Child Rights and Development (IICRD) for elementary school children in western Canada. In 2018, based on personal and professional connections, we introduced the CTP to schoolchildren and teachers in rural Uganda through our study.

In this paper, we demonstrate how young children can be actively, authentically, and meaningfully engaged in learning about their rights and responsibilities through age- and context-appropriate participatory multimodal learning activities. As teachers, researchers, and

¹ The wording of Article 29(d) of the Convention reads, “the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples” (1990).

facilitators, we have taken this opportunity to reflect on this 2018 multimodal participatory action research (PAR) project that sought children's perspectives on their rights in primary school classrooms in Masaka, Uganda, and Victoria, Canada. The project was led by the research question: What do elementary children in Canada and Uganda believe they need to thrive, to be cared for, and to grow and develop? This paper focuses on the research process, where we outline engaging multimodal, participatory approaches to children's rights education and research and the ways in which it enabled authentic child participation. We did not frame this as a formal comparative study, as there were differences in the contexts, delivery, and previous exposure to child rights education; however, we saw value in considering how the children interpreted and expressed rights in these different contexts. We also included questions posed by the children in different contexts about the rights and responsibilities they hold, illustrating their interest in children's rights. Thus, we highlight the importance of acknowledging the unique circumstances and heterogeneities of childhoods (Smith, 2010) with respect to child rights to encourage a richer understanding of children's rights and a more nuanced approach to providing children's rights education.

Scope and Area of Study: Examining Childhoods and the Call for Child Rights Education

Children have a diversity of experiences, abilities, and interests. A myriad of micro, meso, and macro factors impact children's optimal development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), particularly in early years (Allen & Kelly, 2015; Britto et al., 2017). Thus, it is critical that child rights education is appropriately contextualised. Vandenhoe (2020) encourages reflection on both normative universal child rights and the local context (p.187). And as Liebel (2020) argues, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a "permanently changing learning system" (p.125) and is robust enough to incorporate the realities of children's lives in the global south, which challenge Eurocentric notions of childhoods as innocent and vulnerable. Bissell et al. (2011) encourage us to draw upon children's own contexts to develop "creative programs making use of cultural assets to promote children's rights and protection within the community" (p. 24). This includes providing children with resources in their mother tongue or home language. Mother tongue resources not only facilitate comprehension and participation but also contextualise ideas through familiar and localized societal and cultural representations (Stoop, 2017). This aligns with Hill et al. (2006), who argue that we need to acknowledge multiple perspectives and use relevant, contextually, and culturally responsive methods of teaching children about their rights.

Child rights education provides a platform for children to learn about the importance of rights in their and their peers' lives (Jones et al, 2019; Naser et al., 2020; Ruiz-Casares et al., 2017). However, there is a gap in the literature: there is little research that specifically investigates the roles of child rights education in the expansion of children's participatory opportunities and empowerment.

Likewise, child rights education is rarely included in formal educational curricula (Covell et al., 2017). Looking globally, Jerome et al. (2015) found that the majority of the 26 countries within their review demonstrated "no entitlement in the official curriculum for all children to

learn about children's rights" (p.8). Most primary and secondary school educators are unfamiliar with these instruments and have little experience teaching children about their rights. Their ability to provide human rights education is thwarted by a lack of knowledge, training, and resources, as well as the belief that teaching children their rights can challenge traditional and/or cultural beliefs and practices (Jerome, 2016).

There are many reasons children do not learn about their rights. These include educator's unfamiliarity with child rights (Covell et al., 2017) and their inability to access professional development that supports the effective implementation of rights-based education (Cheung, 2016); adults' belief that children are too young to comprehend rights-based concepts (Alderson, 2008; Jerome, 2018) and their fear that rights-focused education for children will undermine their authority (Covell et al., 2017; Jerome, 2018); and states' unwillingness to promote child rights in schools (Howe & Covell, 2013; Wabwile, 2016). In this paper we focus on overturning the assumption that children cannot understand rights and suggest that teachers—with awareness of children's rights and support for implementing child rights-based activities in engaging, meaningful ways—can effectively teach children's rights in age- and contextually appropriate ways.

Theoretical Framework, Methodology and Research Methods: Participatory, Multimodal Approaches to Child Rights Education

We conduct community engaged scholarship and are situated within an institute of higher learning that proposes to “explore, share, [and] advance... [by supporting] interdisciplinary research that pushes boundaries, removes barriers and finds solutions to today's critical issues [by engaging] communities locally, nationally and globally—leaning into partnerships, learning from others and warmly welcoming all people” (Royal Roads University, n.d.). We take this to heart and implement it in the research and community work we do. This allows us to focus on scholarship that works in partnership with participants but is also action-oriented (Reason & Bradbury, 2006; Small & Uttal, 2005), which is an essential component of engaged scholarship (Calleson et al., 2005). As a way of engaging children in meaningful and immersive learning, the teachers and researchers in our participatory action research case study used the CTP to teach five- to eight-year-old children in a classroom in Victoria, Canada and a classroom in Masaka, Uganda about rights and responsibilities, the difference between needs and wants, and the allied concept of empowerment. Although engaged scholarship has traditionally focused on post-secondary education, in linking our scholarship to that of the children we work with, we note the synergies that exist between multimodal participatory action research and engaged scholarship. They share values of learning from lived experience and ensuring participants take a physically and intellectually active role in both process and outcome. As Bryson (2014) contends, engaged scholarship has traditionally focused on higher education, but it has a place wherever engagement requires meaningful participation and a focus on leveraging real life experiences.

As workshop facilitators and researchers (herein referred to as researchers/facilitators), we chose these two contexts due to our personal and professional connections. Given the

distinct contexts and the material and cultural differences between Canada and Uganda, we actively and continuously reflected on our potential and actual biases. Drawing from a range of sources, including engaged scholarship and rights-based pedagogy, we emphasised processes that encouraged learners to be active participants in their own learning and interpretation but also partners in the discoveries about their lived experiences (Nel, 2017).

Children learn through play, inquiry, and activities that engage them in diverse ways—emotionally, visually, aurally, and physically (Kewalramani & Veresov, 2021; Kress & Jewitt, 2003; Mackey & Shane, 2013; Newfield, 2011). They also benefit from activities that bridge home and school experiences and are relevant and accessible to the child. Play-based, creative, multimodal activities are therefore effective in fostering meaningful connections between the children’s understanding of their rights and responsibilities and their identities and relationships within family, community, and school environments.

Within our study, we utilised the play-based learning materials developed for the CTP. It concentrates on creating environments that focus on child well-being, facilitate community and school-based education, build awareness of children’s rights, and support children’s leadership and learning opportunities (IICRD, n.d.). In 2018, through our study, the CTP was introduced to schoolchildren and teachers in rural Uganda. Jones has been conducting educational research in Uganda for almost twenty years, and the Ugandan educators with whom she has been collaborating expressed interest in, and the need for, child rights education in the Ugandan context. Thus, we sought to explore how a multimodal, participatory approach to child rights education could be implemented in Uganda, as well as to explore the similarities and differences between Ugandan and Canadian children’s responses to child rights.

We are both Canadian researchers/facilitators who have worked and conducted research extensively in international contexts. Jones has taught secondary school in Uganda, designed and delivered teacher training programs in Uganda, and conducted research with primary and secondary school students, teachers, educational administrators, parents, and community members in Uganda. Manion has taught elementary school and conducted Child Thrive workshops in Canada for six years. Her research focuses on systems that allow children to thrive, including those affiliated with education.

To support the children’s participation in the workshops, the researchers/facilitators used flexible, jargon-free, child-friendly communication. Child participants were asked to express their knowledge, experience, and ideas through drawings, small and large group discussions, play, and writing, providing a wide range of opportunities for participating in ways that felt comfortable to them. The lessons involved storytelling, puppets, artwork, games, and postcard-writing to key political figures (e.g., the Canadian Prime Minister and the Ugandan President). The Canadian and Ugandan children also exchanged letters. Games and activities were drawn from a range of sources, including Equitas’ *Play it Fair!: Human Rights Education Toolkit for Children* (2008). These multimodal, participatory pedagogical approaches also served as methodological approaches that allowed the children to explore rights-based concepts in a range of ways and to understand their role as citizens in shaping and understanding their world, both within the classroom and beyond. The research drew on participatory action

research (Horgan, 2017; Reason & Bradbury, 2006) that matched the participative nature of the workshops and allowed us to centre the children's voices in the research processes and findings. We drew on observation, note-taking, analysis of children's artifacts (e.g., postcards and other artwork), and researcher/facilitator and teacher/facilitator discussions.

The children were asked which rights were most important to them, who was responsible for protecting their rights, what responsibilities emerged from different rights, and what the difference was between things they needed and things they merely wanted. As researchers/facilitators, we iteratively analysed the data to identify findings and themes (Cresswell, 2008). The first level of analysis focused on data pertaining to children's rights as identified by the participants in the class discussions, which were recorded by the researchers/facilitators. The rights identified by the children in Uganda and Canada were broadly compared while recognizing that each community and societal context was unique. Consideration of contextual differences (such as rural versus urban, differing environmental and geographic factors, differing welfare structures and access to resources, and differing educational policies and practices) were discussed with teachers and clarified through grey and academic literature.

The methodology and findings are elucidated further by Jones and Manion (2023) and Manion and Jones (2020), but the following sections outline reflections that emerged from this project in four areas: in exploring what meaningful participation is, how multimodality can support child rights education, the details of the participatory, multimodal activities in practice, and the reflections on the ideas students shared about child rights. Each area illustrates the role critical literacy plays in bolstering educators' ability to foster contextually relevant child rights education.

Meaningful Participation

Children's fundamental right to participate in decisions that affect their lives is enshrined in Article 12 of the UNCRC: "[children have] 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" (1989). This makes it imperative that children are asked what they think their rights are and how they interpret these rights within their own lived experience. The continuum from adult consultative participation, through collaborative participation, to child-led participation is wide (Lansdown, 2009). Lundy (2007) suggests that to fully adhere to the spirit of Article 12 of the UNCRC, children need a safe space for their voices to be heard, support to have their voices heard, someone to actively hear (or see) their opinions and ideas, and advocates to ensure their ideas are acted upon and influence change. Adults often assume that it is too difficult to meaningfully bring children into decision-making processes, research, or co-created curriculum and may even feel that providing space for children to participate threatens existing familial or societal structures (Horgan, 2017). Poor to mediocre examples of participation can involve passive participation where a participant is asked to provide input, but the purpose of the activities is unclear. Hart (2007) produced an oft-quoted hierarchy of participation that moves from most collaborative to least: from child-initiated, shared decisions with adults to tokenism, decoration, and manipulation. We argue that children's education has

a vital role in creating healthy dialogue and active, engaged citizens, while also supporting their identity, belonging, and autonomy and potentially reducing levels of societal violence (Covell & Howe, 2012; Souto-Manning, 2017).

Participatory processes were built into the CTP workshops and into the participatory action research design to counter the fact that children are often disregarded within society (Jones et al, 2019). Adults often see children located on a spectrum between being individuals who are naive, vulnerable, and in need of protection to people with full rights and responsibilities who can make their own choices and whose rights must be asserted and upheld. Nixon (2002) suggests that adults often feel they know best for children, even though adults themselves have their own backgrounds, experiences, perspectives, and biases and may have little understanding of a child's context or life experiences. Adult assumptions of 'knowing best' for children prevent them from truly knowing children's unique worlds, thoughts, and experiences and from working collaboratively to build on children's strengths, expertise, and abilities.

For example, in Uganda rights and duties are embedded within the household in traditional cultural practices (Seruwagi, 2017) and often require children to perform a wide range of challenging and time-intensive domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, herding animals, fetching water and firewood, washing clothes, farming, and looking after siblings. A Eurocentric perspective might view these multitudinous and intensive domestic activities as child labour, thereby clashing with children's rights. However, this fails to acknowledge the contextual and cultural underpinnings from whence these children's domestic responsibilities have emerged. Socioeconomic conditions often require that children contribute to the household so parents can provide the family's basic needs. In addition, meaningfully contributing to the household is an important part of socialisation, life skills training, and securing a sense of belonging in the family and community.

Discussions with children about their role or their level of agency within the household rarely make it into academic writing. We propose that play-based activities in elementary schools further support child rights education which is foundational to citizenship and democracy building as well as exploring locally and culturally bounded understandings of children's rights and responsibilities. There are variations on the idea of good citizenship that go beyond the scope of this paper, but within the context of this research project it is notable that rights-based education allows teachers and students to explore their interrelated commitments to one another within their classroom, their families, their communities, and beyond (Levine & Youniss, 2009). Exploring the concept of rights with children and allowing them to define what these rights mean in their specific contexts creates opportunities for empowerment.

Multimodality and Child's Rights Education

Participation offers both a theoretical grounding in understanding the impact of child rights education and an imperative for practice, which can be furthered through engaged multimodal and play-based approaches. In our study, play was used to teach children about their rights, engage them in sharing their thoughts about rights, and contribute to cross-context communication about children's rights.

Multimodality offers a fruitful and accessible way for children to explore their own meanings of child rights and integrate these meanings into their embodied understandings (Mackey & Shane, 2013; Newfield, 2011). In our project, children demonstrated openness to thinking about rights and responsibilities as they related to their contexts, lived realities, cultures, and languages. This openness was further illustrated when the children were allowed to express their ideas and discuss rights in multiple creative modes like images, play, text, and spoken word (Manion & Jones, 2020). The multimodal workshops and participatory action methodological approach allowed us to better engage students and to conduct research *with*, as opposed to *on*, the participants. We thereby privileged participants' inherent expertise regarding their lived realities, unique contexts, and specific local needs, including greater access to resources, information, and/or support (Beeman-Cadwaller et al., 2012).

Alongside multimodal approaches, participatory action processes also support active engagement and cyclical learning. Participatory action recognises that those living an experience are the most knowledgeable about that experience (Reason & Bradbury, 2006). This aligns with Article 12 of the UNCRC, which calls for young people's voices to be heard. Engaging children actively and meaningfully in participatory action requires that activities, concepts, questions, and topics are child-friendly, age- and context-appropriate, and support their ability to thrive. These all align well with multimodal approaches to inquiry and engaged learning. Multimodal educational strategies nurture meaning-making approaches to communication through gestures, images, sounds, and other material representations (Jewitt, 2008, p. 246; Kress, 2011; Kress & Jewitt, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

By extending inquiry and expression beyond formal modes of communication, a multimodal participatory action methodology can democratise communicative exchanges in ways that include and value the contributions of children and support their political stake in active and meaningful participation (Jones & Walker, 2011) through age-appropriate activities that provide children with the opportunity to reclaim spaces often occupied by adults (Biddle, 2017).

In this study, a multimodal participatory action methodological approach 1) enabled all participants to have opportunities to engage in creative interrogation of children's rights and associated responsibilities, 2) encouraged participants to express their thoughts on children's rights in diverse ways that were enjoyable and comfortable for them, and 3) democratised the research and course context through the children's participation in multimodal activities and sharing of their ideas about child rights and responsibilities.

Process and Findings: Participatory, Multimodal Activities in Practice via Child Thrive

Reflecting upon our study through the lens of engaged scholarship highlighted the research processes that allowed us to actively engage educators and children in participatory activities where they shared their ideas and experiences with respect to child rights. As such, the process and findings are discussed in tandem in this section to illustrate how findings were elicited.

While each CTP workshop is tailored to the class's age, grade, and current curriculum, the case study implemented similar workshops in both Uganda and Canada. In Uganda, the primary school is in the Masaka District in South Central Uganda. The workshop took place

in a Primary One (Grade One) class with 34 students. It was led by the school headteacher, the classroom teacher, and the researcher/facilitator. The Canadian Grade Two class was led by the classroom teacher, a CTP facilitator, and the researcher/facilitator and had 22 students. It was based in a suburban elementary school in Victoria, Canada. This school has hosted Child Thrive Workshops for several years. Each class included a workshop on children's rights, and the two classes were also invited to communicate with each other over subsequent months. The workshops themselves are facilitated by adults who introduce the sessions and the activities: they begin with adult-led activities, move onto child-led multimodal activities, and end with adult-child collaborative activities. The study included comparative elements but—given the differences between the two communities, the education systems, and children—it focused more on creating a dialogue on children's rights in different contexts.

Ethical considerations about research with children were prioritized. In both countries, ethical approvals from recognized Research Ethics Committees were obtained; consent to participate was gained from the school (and the school board in Canada), the parents, and the children at the outset of the study and during the workshops. The children's privacy and anonymity in knowledge products was maintained throughout. As the headteacher in Uganda felt there were significant rights violations for children and particularly for girls in her school and community, she was keen to participate in the workshops to help educate children about their rights. The teacher in Canada had participated in workshops in previous years and was committed to child rights education, but she was particularly interested in having an exchange with children in Uganda. The dialogue between the classes in the two communities also provided the opportunity to focus on curricular objectives in both settings, such as community advocacy and global citizenship.

To gain informed consent, parents were told about the research and workshops' purpose in the local language, either Luganda or English. According to teachers, Ugandan parents were initially hesitant about children learning about their rights, as this was perceived to undermine the parents' authority. However, after their questions were answered and their concerns allayed, verbal and written consent was provided for all students in both sites. The children were also asked for their verbal assent before participating and all assented. In Canada, there were two researchers/facilitators who were helped by the teacher. In Uganda, the researchers/facilitators and the teacher co-facilitated the workshop.

In both cases a brief introduction to the workshop was given, including a discussion on children's rights. In both sites a hand puppet was used to build multimodal approaches. In Canada, 'Giggles' and in Uganda, 'Nunu' introduced the special session on children's rights. Children in both countries expressed glee at seeing the puppets. Many of the Ugandan children were introduced to a puppet for the first time in their lives. In both countries the puppets were introduced as visiting from the Planet Zog and wanting to know more about children's rights on planet Earth. This introduced the ability to ask naïve questions to the children to spark dialogue.

In both sites, the facilitators and the research project between Canada and Uganda was introduced alongside the activities. The children were invited to consider children's rights and

responsibilities, as well as the similarities and differences of understandings, priorities, and experiences between Ugandan and Canadian children.

The sessions began with the facilitators noting that rights are things that the children need to survive and thrive and that every child is entitled to these rights regardless of where they live. To help this make sense, the facilitators further noted that rights are things you need as opposed to things you want or like. The facilitators further explained that children's rights are promised by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Next, facilitators asked the children what they thought they needed to be healthy, safe, heard, and happy. Their answers have been transposed in Table 1.

Table 1. Children's List of Rights in Uganda and Canada

Uganda	Canada
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good sleep and rest • Listened to • Properly handled • Good health (access to medication/ vaccinations) • Clothing • Good food • Good life • Good family • Ability to go to school (to have school fees paid by parents) • Good home • Being beautiful • Happiness • Parental love • Safety and security • Freedom from beatings • Freedom from poverty • Ability to move freely • Feeling free 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A room or a house (or shelter) • A family who loves them • Safety • Ability to write (and be listened to) • School • Healthy food • Water • Clean air

To help the children further understand what rights were, the facilitators asked the children what responsibilities came with these rights. The children noted several responsibilities that illustrated their understanding of rights and affiliated responsibilities. For instance, they shared that if they had the right to be cared for, they also needed to treat others well (for instance, their parents). The children listed several other responsibilities: sharing; being nice to one another; studying hard; cleaning the house or their room; helping their parents, family, friends, and teachers; wishing the best for others; valuing the love of family; doing chores; feeding animals; digging in the farm; looking after younger children; respecting others; and protecting others.



Figure 1. The Facilitator/Teacher Introducing Nunu the Puppet in Uganda.
Photo by Shelley Jones



Figure 2. Illustration of Children in Uganda Playing Fishing for Rights.
Photo by Shelley Jones

divided into three groups, each of which engaged in an activity for about 20 minutes before rotating so all activities were undertaken by all students.

The first activity was called 'Fishing for Rights and Responsibilities' (based on Equitas, 2008), which focuses on children matching different rights and responsibilities (see Figure 2). Casting a fishing rod (made with a stick, string, and a magnet), the children catch a fish made of paper and a magnetised paperclip. The fish has either a right or a responsibility on it and the children identified which one it is. The next activity was called 'What Children Need.' Its purpose was to help children identify the things children believe they need to thrive and how this differs from the things they want but do not need. The children are asked to draw an outline of

The facilitators further shared that in addition to students having rights, there were people responsible for protecting and upholding their rights. When the facilitators asked the Ugandan children who was responsible for protecting their rights, they stated their parents, their teachers, and themselves. In Canada, students suggested the list include mothers, fathers, siblings, other family, teachers, police officers, mayors, fire fighters, doctors, nurses, and each other.

After this initial discussion on rights, the facilitators with the puppet read the children the book *I Have the Right to be A Child* (2012) by author Alain Serres and illustrator Aurelia Fronty (see Figure 1). In Uganda, this included a translation of the book into Luganda with pictures more relevant to the Ugandan context. (The headteacher created this translated version of the book).

Following this reading, the facilitators asked the children about any rights that surprised them. In both classes, many of the children expressed that they liked the "right to play." Following this session, the children in Uganda had a break for lunch, while the children in Canada moved into interactive activities.

Next were a set of three activities. The class was

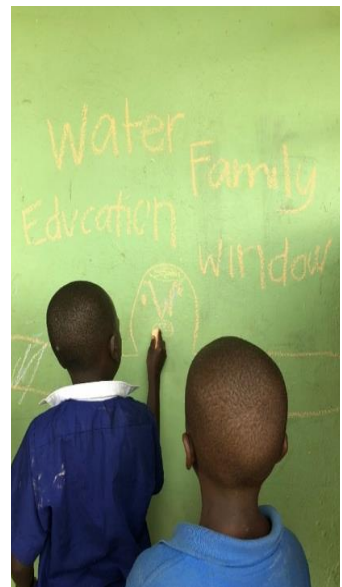


Figure 3. Students in Uganda Playing 'What Children Need'.
Photo by Shelley Jones



Figure 4. Students in Uganda Drawing Their Postcards. Photo by Shelley Jones

Equitas, 2008). Students then wrote letters to children in the other class (See Figure 4). In keeping with the workshops, they were encouraged to add drawings depicting the rights they felt were most important to them. On the other side of their pictures, they wrote a letter based on the following template:

Dear Friend in Canada/Uganda,
This is me [activity in drawing].
Please tell me about you.
Sincerely,

Letters were collected and the children were told the letters would be sent to the children in the other country.

The closing activity involved the children and the facilitators standing in a circle holding hands. In Canada, the objective was to move a hula hoop around the circle without breaking the circle. In Uganda, the closing circle sang a song together. In either case, the focus was on cooperation, interconnectivity, and working together.

An additional session focused specifically on the connections between the Canadian and Ugandan students. It aimed at increasing the students' understanding about child rights, creating connections between different communities, and providing space to discuss the similarities and differences in their understandings of child rights. This session allowed the children to express their ideas to a new friend of a similar age, strengthen relationships with educators in both countries, and synthesize key points to analyze for a research paper and presentation.

their body on the wall with chalk and then write or draw the things that they need and that they want and discuss them.

The third activity included writing postcards to their political leaders, either President Yoweri Museveni or Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. This allows students to express their right to a voice in matters that impact them (as outlined in Article 12 of the UNCRC). The postcard invited them to create and share a picture expressing a right that is important to them (based on



Figure 5. A Selection of Four Pictures Created by Students (from Left to Right) in Uganda, Canada, Uganda, Canada. Photos by Shelley Jones

In the Canadian session, the facilitators recapped key ideas, including that all children had rights, that they had a role in protecting children’s rights, and that there were four families of rights—to be yourself, to be safe, to be healthy, and to be heard. Children in all parts of the world have the same basic rights, so the facilitators invited the children to hear more about Uganda or Canada and the children in the other school (see Figure 6). In Canada, a researcher/facilitator shared a photo presentation about Uganda and Masaka (where the school is located). Then the researcher/facilitator shared questions the Ugandan students asked the Canadian children. Unfortunately, time did not permit for this process to be duplicated in Uganda. Students were provided with letters from the children to read. Based on this, they were asked what questions they would like to ask in return. Both sets of questions are noted in the following section.

To keep the session play-based, the facilitators then led a game called ‘Rights Freeze.’ First, the children were asked to think of a right that was important to them (like the right to nutritious food) and a way to represent the right with their body. The facilitators then played music and when the music stopped the children were meant to freeze in a way that represented the right they chose. There were three rounds to the game and it generated discussion about the different rights represented.

Then the children were given time to develop their letters. They had several days to complete these, as shown in Figure 7. The session then closed with another circle where the children cooperated to move the hula hoop around the circle without breaking the link.



Figure 6. The Facilitator/Researcher and a Young Student Helper Sharing Information about the School and Community in Uganda with Students in Canada. Photo by Shelley Jones



Figure 7. Children in Canada Showing Postcards Received from Students in Uganda and Looking at Pictures of Children Writing Postcards in Uganda. Photos by Shelley Jones

Process and Findings: Reflections on Student Ideas and Questions about Child Rights

When verbally asked to highlight specific rights, the Ugandan and Canadian children noted similar rights, such as the right to school, dance, healthy food, and a good home. In both places students also recognised the right to play (e.g., football) and expressed surprise this was a right. The Canadian children additionally noted the right to a room, house, or shelter; to a family who loves them; safety; to write (and be listened to); to school; and to healthy food, clean water, and clean air. The children were asked to draw pictures and write letters that highlighted specific rights or areas for rights. The researchers analysed the pictures and summarised one right per photo. The results are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. *Summary of Rights Depicted in Letters and Pictures by Children in Canada and Uganda*

Right	Uganda (n=34)		Canada (n=22)	
	Letters	Pictures	Letters/Words	Pictures
Play	29	30	17	11
Food	6	14	6	0
Education/school	5	9	2	1
Home	2	20	5	9
Friends	2	2	8	8
Family	1	1	1	5
Travel (bus)	0	5	0	0
Art (expression)			4	0
Clothes			1	1
Clean water			2	2
Love			1	1
Clean environment/ clean air			0	1

Of interest in Table 2 is that the Canadian children identified more diverse rights than the Ugandan children. Likewise, while both groups of students identified similar rights as being important to them, differences emerged because of their environmental context: in their pictures, the Ugandan children commonly noted milking a cow or playing football (soccer), while the Canadian children noted the right to clean air and water. And while all children highlighted the role of their family, their teachers, and themselves in protecting rights, children in Canada were more likely to additionally suggest professional support such as nurses, doctors, police officers, firefighters, and politicians.

Another matter of interest is that several of the Ugandan children's drawings featured a school bus. The researcher/facilitator had not noticed a bus on the school grounds, so followed

up on this with the headteacher who confirmed that the school did not have one. She added that “kids here move long distances of like 5km -10km, and cross locally made bridges as the place is surrounded by water, so to them getting a school bus to take them to school [would be] a big solution for their suffering.” The children may have been indicating that along with their right to education was their right to *access* education. While discussions were had with the children on their own interpretation of their drawings, they were limited. If this project were replicated, a more thorough analysis with the children about their drawings could provide more detailed data.

As noted, after the original workshop, an exchange was set up between the two groups of students that included sharing letters; as well, additional sessions occurred over several months. The Ugandan children had follow-up questions for the Canadian children, which were sent via email by the teacher/facilitator. These read as follows:

1. Are children normally taught in school or home how to be open or straight when it comes to their rights?
2. Are jobs and responsibilities chosen for the kids and depending on gender?
3. How about home chores, are they done according to gender?
4. How about when children’s rights are violated, how are kids helped and what happens to the culprit?

The children in Canada responded that they learned about their rights both in school and at home. However, initially, most agreed that they were taught about children’s rights in school, while only a few agreed they were taught rights at home. In differentiating between school and home, students suggested they were directly taught about rights in schools, but rights were inferred at home through modelling or provision of basic needs. Examples of rights they mentioned were healthy food, clean water, safe shelter, safe harbour, access to medical care, and encouragement to go to school.

In response to the second and third questions, the Canadian students suggested that children had the same responsibilities and opportunities in school and at home. They also expressed that they had the same opportunities whether they were a boy or a girl. To further expand on this, the children noted that their teacher gave them jobs like helping in class, and their parents and family gave them jobs like cleaning their room or helping with cooking. Of note, these appeared to be similar to the Ugandan children’s responses.

The Canadian students’ discussion surrounding breaches of rights was more sensitive but also less clear. One student stated that if someone breached their rights, “they would get in trouble.” Other students suggested that they would “tell someone,” including an adult like a teacher, parent, or grandparent. The children appeared to struggle with interpreting this question. They paused before the teacher helped them think through an example where one student was not treating another with respect. The scenario depicted teachers and adults supporting the children to ensure that their needs were met, but also expecting the children to gain the skills to treat each other with respect and dignity. This was an interesting discussion.

The children in Canada were steered in the direction of considering the rights violation as bullying or school-based conflict and were able to contextualise it as such. The Canadian teacher later recounted that she was uncomfortable opening a discussion on child abuse and chose to redirect the discussion to bullying, a relevant topic within the school context.

However, the headteacher in Uganda interpreted the question as referring to fundamental rights breaches akin to serious and potentially life-threatening child abuse. She stated that “kids here suffer violence ranging from beating, starving, failure to be taken to school, early /forced marriage, child labour, etc. Some of these kids are victims of domestic violence by drunken parents, prostitutes, etc. So, some are small cases, others are criminal” (personal communication, 2018). This illustrates a significant difference in the lived realities of the two groups of children: while violence against children occurs in the Canadian context, it is less openly seen or discussed in schools.

The children in Canada also asked questions that were more focused on the environmental differences between the two communities. These included “how long does it take to travel there”; “do you write your last name first”; “what are the rules of football” and “are they different than soccer (why is the name different)”; “do you play baseball”; “how are your houses built”; “what kind of gift can we send you (e.g., something you do not have)”; “what age or grade does your school go to”; “what grade do you want to go to”; “when do you start working”; “do you have a tv and do you watch tv”; “do you have power (i.e., electricity)”; “how many kids are in your class”; “how do you get around, for instance to school (e.g., by bicycle)”; and “do you have cactus”? The emergent nature of these questions illustrates the burgeoning curiosity the children had about each other’s contexts, particularly as the differences surfaced. While the school year ended and the dialogue was cut off, this added layer of multimodal engagement hinted at what could emerge with more time.

Conclusion: Participatory, Multimodal Approaches to Child Rights Education

The multimodal, participatory, and contextualised workshops provided a platform for these students to learn about child rights and responsibilities, make sense of them within their own context, and contrast them with children in a different context. Similarities and differences emerged when analyzing the findings from the two different contexts. The children’s discussions revealed divergent interests, particularly around the environment, gender, and circles of protection. For instance, the right to clean air and clean water were identified by children in Victoria, but this was not a right that children in Uganda identified. Interestingly, while there was a discussion about the right to non-discrimination based on sex, colour, race, and ability in both contexts, the children did not initially identify this as a key right in their verbal discussions or in the drawings and letters. However, the additional questions about gender that the Ugandan children asked the Canadian children and the ensuing discussions the children had about gender raised interesting insights about perceived differences pertaining to gender roles and opportunities in each location. Gender inequality remains highly problematic in Uganda (Allen & Kelly, 2015; Bantebya et al., 2014; Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013; Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labour, and Social Development, 2007), and an

unfair distribution of domestic chores is a major impediment to girls' educational participation and, consequently, life opportunities (Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013). Furthermore, while both groups of students identified family, teachers, nurses, and themselves as being responsible for protecting their rights, the children in Canada also identified political figures and frontline service workers (e.g., firefighters), suggesting that they recognised a wider circle of protection within civic institutions. These highlighted how context matters in understanding rights, their relative importance, and their ability to be enacted.

Reflections based on the case study point towards the power and efficacy of multimodal play-based pedagogy to engage children in rights-based education. This project opened a dialogue between two disparately located groups of schoolchildren and the children in both Uganda and Canada expressed a keen interest in learning more about each other and about child rights. Anecdotally, the Child Thrive workshops and multimodal participatory research approaches have consistently demonstrated that children have an acute sense of the rights pertaining to survival, e.g., shelter, food, water, family, and clean air. The workshops have also demonstrated that children understand that rights and responsibilities are important to the social fabric of their families and communities and wish to see the rights for themselves, and for others, respected and upheld. The children in both schools expressed the importance of supporting the rights of others. The notion that rights are tied to responsibility is an important element to encourage (Byrne & Lundy, 2013; Covell & Howe, 2012; Jones & Walker, 2011). This supports the fundamental ethics and values—empathy, justice, love, support, and protection—that underscore children's rights. While children are often left out of discussions about issues that impact their welfare and are considered unable to understand concepts like rights (Bissell et al., 2011; Lundy, 2012), this project overturns these assumptions as simplistic and erroneous and illustrates that they do not appreciate and/or acknowledge children's genuine interest in, engagement with, and insights about rights and their ability to understand them within their own contexts. Ultimately, this project offers a platform for further research and dialogue on how to best embed multimodal, participatory, play-based, and cross-cultural child rights education in schools.

Children are entitled to be educated about their rights. They also have the right to be meaningfully involved in decisions about their life. However, many children do not know about the UNCRC or what it means to have rights and responsibilities. By exploring children's understanding of their rights with them, as well as supporting their education through rights-based play, we hope this research deepens our collective understanding of rights in context and encourages others to use this information to better target initiatives focused on rights-based education. Through this process, the children, teachers, and facilitators explored ways to help children meaningfully understand and incorporate the UNCRC into their lives and to encourage thriving children and healthy communities.

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About the Authors

Shelley Jones (*corresponding author*), a Professor at Royal Roads University, has teaching experience at all levels (pre-primary to tertiary) in diverse international contexts (Tanzania, Uganda, Canada, England, and Japan). Her research and publications are focused on the areas of children's rights, gender and education, girls and women's empowerment, and feminist participatory action research. Email: Shelley.12jones@royalroads.ca

Kathleen Manion is a Professor at Royal Roads University and an Associate at the International Institute of Child Rights and Development. With thirty years experience in research, social and community services and academia, Kathleen's academic and practice interests focus on systems that support children to thrive.

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