Enhancing Participation of Children in Schools:
A Social Worker's Perspective

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Abstract
This abstract outlines a research paper that aims to develop a social work model to enhance children's participation in school governance. The study acknowledges the importance of children's involvement in decision-making processes, citing its positive impact on their cognitive and social development, value formation, and overall well-being. The research employs a qualitative approach, focusing on the student government of a public elementary school in an urban setting. Data was collected through document review, focus group discussions with five (5) student government members, and interviews with key informants including the student government advisor, two (2) officers from the General Parents and Teachers Association (GPTA), and the school head of the public elementary school. Findings suggest that there is a lack of representation of students in school governance and there are several limitations in the involvement of the student government in school activities. Following these, the author proposes a social work model in ensuring a meaningful representation of pupils in school governance. The model illustrates the theory of change in response to child participation issues, and proposes various social work interventions including organizing and mobilization of stakeholders, capacity-building, and advocacy to enhance children participation in school.

Keywords: *social work model-building, children participation, children protection, school social work, children's rights*

Introduction

Globally, children's participation has been one of the most contested and scrutinized principle and articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child since it was espoused by the United Nations in 1989. (Lansdown, 2010) Over the past years, governments, civil society organizations, academic institutions, and development organizations have taken various actions in response to this right. (Save the Children & UNICEF, 2011) Some of these include advocacy to promote and legitimize the notion of child participation and exploration of means and processes to translate it into practice. Children worldwide have already been involved in advocacy, research, campaigns, peer education, community development projects, political discussion, project development, and democratic partaking in school. (Lansdown, 2010; Save the Children & UNICEF, 2011)

Save the Children and UNICEF (2011) identified several benefits of children participation. First, participation leads to personal development. Taking children's views and experiences in decision-making develops children's self-esteem, cognitive and social skills, and respect for others. The more they contribute effectively, the greater the impact on their personal development. Second, participation leads to better decision making. Adults do not always have enough information about children's lives to be able to make appropriate and effective decisions on policies and projects intended for children. Children with their experience and knowledge about their needs and concerns, can contribute to making decisions affecting them more relevant and effective. Third, participation serves to protect children from violence and harm. Traditionally, children do not have access to information on their entitlement to protection from violence and the mechanisms to which they may challenge the problem. The confidence they developed through participation also empowers them to confront abuses of their rights. Adults can only be informed and act on protection issues only if children can provide that information. Fourth,

participation prepares children for necessary skills for society development. Providing opportunities for children participation does not only enhance children's self-esteem but also develops their negotiation and decision-making skills with other people through family discussions, conflict resolution in schools, and even contributing to policy making at the local and national level. Lastly, participation strengthens accountability by holding duty-bearers accountable for the attainment of children's rights through dialogues and forums.

The Philippines, as a signatory of the United Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified laws to uphold the rights of the child to survival, development and participation, and protection. In particular, the country has institutionalized and translated the principle of children's participation to national and administrative policies. But even before the ratification of UNCRC, the country already identifies children as an active participant *"in civic affairs in the promotion of general welfare, always bearing in mind that it is the youth who will eventually be called upon to discharge the responsibility of leadership"* as stipulated in Article 4 section 6 of the *1974 Child and Youth Welfare Code*. With the passage of *1991 Local Government Code*, children's participation in policy processes was institutionalized with the establishment of *Katipunan ng Kabataan*. In the 1997 *Social Reform Act*, children and youth were also identified as a basic sector and participant to policy-making processes related to initiatives for poverty alleviation.

In the field of education, various laws have been passed which identifies with children's participation in school governance. The Department of Education (DepEd) developed the Basic Education Reform Agenda (BESRA) with the hopes of contributing to the achievement of the Education for All (EFA) goals. One (1) of the policy reforms is the implementation of School-Based Management (SBM) as a governance framework which highlights *"the empowerment of key stakeholders in school communities to enable them to actively participate in the continuous improvement of schools towards the attainment of higher pupil/student learning outcomes".* (DepEd, 2009) Pupils and students, recognized as school internal stakeholders, are expected to benefit and participate in SBM. Shared leadership among different stakeholders in school is also mandated in the Governance *of Basic Education Act of 2001.* On the other hand, DepEd policies including *DO no. 45 series of 2007, DO no. 84 series of 2010, DO no. 47 series of 2014, and DO no. 11 series of 2016*, institutionalizes the establishment of student governing bodies both in primary and secondary schools. These policies believe that pupils and students can contribute to the promotion of quality education and academic excellence and can have representation in the School Governing Council (SGC) to forward their rights and welfare.

Despite the existence of extensive laws, children's meaningful participation both in national, local, and school governance remains elusive. In a study of Bessell (2009) with 28 participants from government and non-government agencies in the Philippines, findings suggest that community and cultural beliefs are the greatest barrier to children's participation. She mentioned that views about respect for elders and the expectation that children should assume a submissive role challenge children's participation in different situations. The same study identified that existing formal bodies and mechanisms are not child-friendly. This restricts participation, and at times, makes participation tokenistic. Furthermore, because of lack of access to relevant materials and lack of training, adults working with children had an "incomplete understanding" of the concept of children participation's principles and its practice. This significantly limits children's ability to participate meaningfully.

Nonetheless, the government, as a duty-bearer, is responsible in making children participation in governance realized and attained. It also has responsibility to ensure that children's participation is meaningful and observed at all levels of decision-making – in the family, school, organizations, and community.

School is recognized as one of the important institutions, second to the family, that provides opportunities for children to develop confidence and relevant skills for democratic leadership and citizenship. It also facilitates the maintenance and transmission of societal norms and cultural practices to new generations. Hence, it is imperative that schools are transformed to become a learning and enabling environment that promotes children's right to participation.

For this matter, the paper aims to develop a child-centered intervention to promote a meaningful children participation in elementary schools. To do this, an assessment of the extent and quality of children's participation in school governance is conducted in an elementary school using a child-rights framework. This paper also hopes to contribute to the limited literature on children's participation in school management. The school has never been a primary setting of social work practice in the Philippines. However, it hopes to further inform the profession of its potential contributions in promoting and advancing children's rights in schools

Theoretical Framework

The UNCRC redefined the status of children and young people by recognizing their civil and political rights, particularly through Article 12, which mentions that the *"state parties shall assure to the child who is a capable of forming his or her own views the right to express views freely in all matters affecting the child, the view of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child child".* (Woodhead, 2010; UNICEF, n.d.) With this article, states are mandated to ensure that considerable efforts are made to ensure the attainment of this right. It establishes the view of children as not passive beneficiaries of adult protective care rather a subject of their rights entitled to be engaged in matters and decisions that affect them, either as individuals and as a group, in accordance with their evolving capacities. (Save the Children & UNICEF, 2011)

According to Hart (1992), there are levels of children's participation. Participation becomes increasingly meaningful as one moves from level one (1) up to the eight (8) level. The first three levels are not considered meaningful. The succeeding five (5) levels are appropriate for children based on the activity they engage with, the level of their decision-making skills, and evolving capacities. On the other hand, Save the Children & UNICEF (2011) identified three (3) potential approaches to children's participation namely consultative, collaborative, and child led. *Table 1* provides a summarized description of these approaches.

Table 1. Three approaches to children's participation

Consultative	Collaborative	Child-Led
- Adult-initiated - Adult-led and managed - Lacking possibility for children to control outcomes - Adult seek children's views to build knowledge and information about their lives	- Adult initiated - Partnership with children - Allows children to influence and challenge process and outcomes - Allows self-directed action by children	- Issue of concern is identified by children - Adults are only facilitators - Children controls the process

Source: Save the Children & UNICEF, 2011

In addition, standards on children's participation are also suggested by Save the Children & UNICEF (2011). These standards are composed of nine (9) requirements. Adherence to these standards ensure that children are really given genuine opportunity to articulate their views and express themselves freely. The nine (9) basic requirements are the following listed below in Table 2.

Table 2. Nine Requirements on Child Participation

Requirements	Description
1. Transparent and Informative	Full accessibility, diversity-sensitive and age-appropriate information about the right to express views freely, to be given due weight, and how participation will happen, including the scope, purpose and potential effects, must be provided to children.
2. Voluntary	Expressing views and involvement should never be imposed to children. They should be informed that they can withdraw their involvement at any stage.
3. Respectful	Children should have an opportunity to initiate their ideas and views. Their views and opinions should be treated with respect. Their contribution at home, in school, culture, and community should be acknowledged and respected.
4. Relevant	Opportunities available for children to express their views and to get involve in should be of real relevance to their lives and enable them to derive from their knowledge, skills and abilities about the matter at hand.
5. Facilitated with child-friendly environment and working methods	In working with children, approaches should be according to their evolving capacities. Adequate time and resources should be provided to children to ensure that they are adequately prepared and have the confidence to contribute their views. Consideration needs to be given to children since children have varying needs of support according to their age and evolving capacity.
6. Inclusive	Participation should avoid patterns of discrimination and promote inclusivity especially for marginalized children.

7. Supported by Training	Adults should be prepared and have the necessary skills and support to facilitate children's participation effectively.
8. Safe and Sensitive to Risk	Expression of views may involve risks. Adults have the responsibility towards the children with whom they work with and must take every precautionary measure to mitigate risks to children such as violence, exploitation, or any negative consequences of their participation.
9. Accountable	Endeavors involving children should commit to follow-up and evaluation. Children are entitled to be provided with feedback regarding the result of their participation and how it influenced issues or matters at stake. If possible, children should be involved in the monitoring and evaluation process.

Source: Save the Children & UNICEF, 2011

Methodology

To provide insights on the proposed social work model in enhancing children's participation in school, qualitative approaches were used to determine the extent and quality of participation of the Supreme Pupil Government (SPG), the student government officers, in one elementary school in an urban setting. The assessment also identified the priority issues and problems of the student government related to their participation in school management. The selection of school is based on the following: (1) it was a partner school of the author's former organization which leads to an assumption that the school is open to partner with programs or projects related to children's rights; (2) it is convenient for the author to conduct assessment due to proximity and personal connection with few personnel in the said school; and, (2), the school is at the progressive level in SBM, which means there is a functional school governing council and that there is a high participation of stakeholders in school-based management.

Primary and secondary data collection was conducted. The latter involved review of school documents to determine school profile, while the former involved a conduct of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interviews (KII). The FGD respondents were five (5) SPG members while the KII respondents were the SPG adviser, two (2) GPTA officers, and the school head.

In determining the extent and quality of participation of the SPG in their school, A KII guide interview questions were developed for the corresponding respondents while the FGD design was developed based on Save the Children's (2014) Tool kit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation. During the FGD, three activities from Save the Children's (2014) toolkit were utilized: Body Mapping, Visual Programme Cycle Participatory Mapping, and Strips and Mats. Body Mapping involved participants drawing on a body outline to represent their feelings and experiences in school, aiming to identify likes and dislikes.

To determine and analyze the scope of participation of children, Visual Programme Cycle Participatory Mapping was conducted. Strips and Mats was a modified version of the pots and stones used to assess the quality of participation of children. After each activity was conducted, respondents discussed their output during the facilitated group discussion.

Prior to data collection, an informed consent was sought from the participants. Children and adult participants were informed of the purpose of the assessment and agreed to participate voluntarily in this study. All participants were assured of confidentiality, and their anonymity was protected throughout the data collection and analysis process. For confidentiality reasons, the name of the school will not be mentioned in this paper.

Results and Discussion
School Profile

The School-Based Management level of the elementary school is progressive. This means that the SGC is functional and GPTA involvement in school affairs is satisfactory. Moreover, Child Protection Committee is also established and functional. The existing student organizations are composed of SPG, as the primary student governing body, and co-curricular clubs such as Araling Panlipunan Club, Student Paper Club, etc. SPG is composed of 10 officers – positions are president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, auditor, public relations/information officer, peace officer and Grade 4, 5, & 6 representatives.

Extent of SPG Participation

Based on the result of the Visual Programme Cycle Participatory Mapping, SPG had been involved in six (6) school activities at the time of the assessment. These activities include the orientation on LRMDS portal, celebration of United Nations (UN) day, creation of Vertical Garden for *Gulayan sa*

Paaralan, *Brigada Eskwela,* installation of hydroponics, and Green Revolution Campaign. The orientation on the LRMDS portal is an activity to inform the students on the use of such system which intends to increase distribution and access to learning, teaching and professional development resources at the school level. The Celebration of UN Day is commemorating the anniversary of United Nations through a school program and various competitions. The vertical garden, installation of hydroponics and green revolution campaigns are school activities to support the feeding program and to promote the cleanliness of the school. The Brigada Eskwela is an annual program of the school to involve different stakeholders in the maintenance and repair of the school facilities before the official commencement of the school year. The extent of their involvement in each phase of the programme or project cycle is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Scope of Participation

Programme or Project Cycle	Not Involved	Consultative	Collaborative	Child-led
Situational Analysis or Assessment	• Brigada Eskwela • LRMDS Portal • UN day • Vertical Garden • Installation of Hydroponics • Green Revolution			
Planning		• Brigada Eskwela • LRMDS Portal • UN day • Vertical Garden • Installation of Hydroponics • Green Revolution		
Implementation			• Brigada Eskwela • LRMDS Portal • UN day • Vertical Garden • Installation of Hydroponics • Green Revolution	
Monitoring and Evaluation	• Brigada Eskwela • LRMDS Portal • UN day • Installation of Hydroponics • Green Revolution			• Vertical Garden
Reporting	• Brigada Eskwela • LRMDS Portal • UN day • Vertical Garden			

- Installation of Hydroponics
- Green Revolution

Source: Author's Field Work, 2019

As shown in Table 4, some of the findings of the FGD activity highlight several limitations in the involvement of the student government in school programs and activities such as lack of involvement in important aspects of the activities, limited child-led activities, over-reliance on the adult-adviser, and lack of orientation and capacity-building regarding SPG. As shown in table 3, the SPG lacks involvement in some aspects of activities. While the SPG is consulted on certain aspects of planning, they lack involvement in crucial stages such as situational assessment and analysis, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting of the program or activity results or accomplishments. Three (3) of the student respondents mentioned *that "Wala po kaming plano para sa buong taon. Kung ano po ang activities ng school, iyon po ang ginagawa namin."* (We do not have an annual plan. We only plan activities based on school programs.) The absence of child-led activities and the limited training and development opportunities for SPG members suggest that the SPG's role is primarily reactive rather than proactive. While UNCRC is discussed in one (1) subject, *Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao,* this is only discussed in passing. A respondent mentioned that *"napag-usapan po namin iyong children's rights sa ESP po."* (We discussed children's rights in our ESP class before.) There is no intensive discussion on children's right to participate. Moreover, the SPG's heavy reliance on their advisor hinders the development of their independence and leadership skills. When they were asked about their political platform, responses of the participants revealed that they had already forgotten details of the activity while others remembered having activities related to protecting the environment. Only the Green Revolution project was related to their political platform. No orientation regarding their roles and responsibilities was conducted even prior to running for a position in SPG and only the president and vice president attended leadership training.

Table 4. Themes on Child Participation

Themes on Child Participation	Examples given by participants	Participant
Lack of involvement in some important aspects of activities/programs	- The SPG adviser usually does the design of activities. - The SPG are only consulted on their availability to join the activities.	All of the students
	- Children are not included in meetings since the agenda are those matters that should be discussed by adults only - Children cannot fully understand the situation and it may be hard for them to make decisions.	GPTA representative A and B
Lack of child-led activities	- The student government has no planned activities for the academic year. - Adviser usually initiates the activities.	Students A, B and D
Lack of orientation on their roles and responsibilities as SPG prior running for a position in the student government	- The teacher described the role but no formal orientation was attended. - Learned the tasks expected during their term	Students C and E
Lack of orientation on children's participation	- The *Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao* (ESP) covers topic on children's rights in general.	All of the students

Lack of capacity-building opportunities	• Children participation standards are not discussed in ESP. • No trainings or seminars were received as of the time of the interview. • Only the president and vice-president attended the leadership training.	Students C, D and E
	• No trainings or seminars on child participation	All of the students, the adviser, the GPTA representatives, and the school head
Lack of information on activities that they are requested to participate in	• There are activities where they do not know fully understand the purpose of their involvement. • Limited information are shared to them prior the conduct of activities. • Consent for their participation are asked but they don't know that they can say no.	All of the students

Quality of SPG Participation

The results of the Strips and Mats activity suggest that only three (3) out of nine (9) basic requirements on child participation are met, namely relevant, child-friendly, and safe and sensitive to risk. The unmet requirements are the following: the activities and programs being transparent and informative, voluntary, respect, inclusive, supported by training, and accountability. Based on the discussion, SPG members are not given enough information on the seminars and workshops, and other school activities that they are requested to participate in. Moreover, participation information given to the children was lacking. Although their consent was collected, they were not informed that participation is voluntary and that they may decline from participating in school programs and activities. In terms of inclusivity, they think students from grade 1 – 3 have limited or no means to participate in school activities due to their age. On the other hand, lack of training, and mechanisms to monitor children participation and to feedback the result of activity to children are supported by training and accountability as the least implemented requirement.

Other Issues and Concerns regarding the Participation of SPG in School Governance

Based on body mapping activity, results suggest that SPG thinks that adult view them as *"walang muwang" (the student government are innocent and no sense of the world yet)* and *"hindi pa kaya ang gawain pang matanda"* (*they cannot do the tasks considered as for adults only*). This is validated in the interview with GPTA officers, where the respondents believe that the student leaders are still young, cannot fully understand yet the learners' issues in schools, and may have difficulties in decision-making. In Green Revolution campaign activity where they had involved SPG during the implementation, the GPTA respondents mentioned that they deliberately did not involve the student government in planning the activity. They think that children should not get involved with *"usaping pang-matanda" (adult concerns or matters).* They also believe that children's participation in GPTA activities are not needed because those are adults' projects for children.

Although the school governing council is functional, the SPG is not represented in the school governing body as mentioned in the FGD with the student government and in the interview with SPG Adviser. Hence, they are not part of school assessment and development of school improvement plan. In terms of support, SPG is only being supported by one (1) SPG adviser. The SPG adviser herself is not even part of the SGC. Thus, there is no way that their voices are heard in school management meetings. Moreover, teachers do not undergo training on children's participation as mentioned by the SPG adviser. Although the Child Protection Committee receives comprehensive training on UNCRC and child protection mechanisms, it prioritizes matters on child abuses, positive discipline, and anti-bullying.

Discussion

The assessment results of the case suggest that the SPG lacks representation in the school governing council, the highest decision-making body in school, and that there are limitations in their participation in school programs and activities similar with other studies. (Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2011; Yu & Shay, 2022) Although the DepEd School-based Management (SBM) under the BESRA highlights the importance of Pupils and students' participation in SBM, there are no clear promulgation and guidelines on how to facilitate their participation in school governing council.

Following the Save the Children and UNICEF (2011) typologies of children's participation, it is noteworthy that the student government is rarely consulted in most of the phases of school program or project management. Collaboration with adult stakeholders only takes place during the implementation of the activity. During planning phases, their involvement includes identifying who among the student leaders can participate in the said event, what roles they are willing to play, and when they prefer to meet and plan for the implementation of the activities. Like the findings of Morjele & Muthukrishna (2011), school programs or projects are mostly adult initiated, led and managed, and children have limited role in decision-making.

Akin to the study of Duma (2015), the student government is not involved in situational assessment and analysis which are crucial in understanding student issues. There are arguments worldwide on what matters or what issues affecting children should they be involved with. According to Lansdown (2010), most part of decision-making, from the personal to international level, have either a direct or indirect effect on children, and thus can be considered as legitimate matters of concern to children.

The findings also reecho studies of Bessell (2009) and Morojele & Muthukrishna (2011) on the influence of adult perceptions, which may be influenced by cultural beliefs, on children participation. In this study, the GPTA representatives believe that the SPG are too young to be involved in decision-making. This suggests that having an older age, in the perception of the respondents, are equated to maturity and the ability to make sound decisions (Yu & Shay, 2022). In the study of Bessell (2009), findings suggest that there is an *"age hierarchy in Filipino society"* (p.306) and *"that children occupy a social and familial position that is secondary to adults* (p. 307)." This sheds light to the underlying cultural beliefs in the limited participation of children in homes and relevant institutions, and the power differentials among adults and children. Nonetheless, Lansdown (2010) suggests that the Article 12 of UNCRC makes clear that age is not used to limit the significance attributed to a child's view. It recognizes children's evolving capacity and the role of adults to provide enough information so that children can make informed decisions in their lives.

Capacity-building for both the student leaders and the adult stakeholders related to children's rights and children participation are also limited, which is similar to findings of the study of Bessell (2009). Considering the evolving capacities of children, training and development opportunities for the SPG are essential for them to understand and claim their rights, and to become prepared for their roles as representatives of the student body. (Yu and Shay, 2022) According to the standards of children participation as suggested by Save the Children and UNICEF (2011), capacity-building is one of the nine basic requirements for children participation. It purports the need for adults to be prepared and have the necessary skills to support and facilitate children's participation effectively. The study of Cashmore (2001) also identified the availability of trusted advocates of children's rights as part of important conditions for effective participation. Thus, it is important that the adult stakeholders are informed and trained on children's rights and children participation. In addition, Ray (2010) mentioned that in promoting children's participation in critical situations, it is particularly important to prepare children for criticisms and negative reactions towards them. Their experience in asserting their right may either hinder or facilitate further claims-making. Thus, adults have an essential role in creating an enabling environment through development of mechanisms and garnering support from other stakeholders are necessary to make children's right to participate be realized in school. It is noteworthy that the student government is being supported by an adviser. However, heavy reliance on the adviser may hinder the development of their independence and leadership skill. Therefore, it is imperative that the adult support or the student government adviser believes and respects children's rights and is equipped with necessary skills to facilitate children participation.

The nine basic requirements of children participation as suggested by Save the Children and UNICEF (2011) are important to ensure meaningful participation of children. Having only 3 out of 9 basic requirements that are being met in the SPG's involvement in school activities reflect the need to improve the quality of their participation. It is noteworthy that the school was able to facilitate relevant, child-friendly, and safe and sensitive activities for the participation of the SPG. However, there is still a need to improve on the following areas: transparency and informative, voluntary, respect, inclusive, supported by training, and accountability.

According to UNICEF (2006), it is only through having democratic participation among different stakeholders including children that child-friendly schools can claim to be fulfilling children's right to education. The principle of democratic participation can only be exercised if students, parents, teachers, and other community members have a role in determining the structure, content and processes of education and school governance. Through this process, the quality of education is enhanced. Thus, creating opportunities for children to voice their issues and to be heard not just to fulfill children's right to participation but their right to quality education as well.

Proposing a Social Work Practice Model

The school setting has never been the primary field of social work practice, especially in the Philippines. Although social work professionals working for child protection agencies may partner with schools to promote protection rights of students and to provide direct welfare services not offered in schools, the field of education is the realm of child development workers and educators. However, the emerging issues on the realization of children's rights in school calls for the extension of work in the social work profession.

According to Wertheimer, M. et al. (2004), the new age has brought rapid changes and new challenges to communities. This forces the social work profession to acquire knowledge and skills beyond the mainstream social work curricula could offer. However, the profession must adapt to these changes to continuously remain relevant in society. For this to happen, partnership with communities is seen as a worthwhile opportunity to be able to re-examine the competencies applied by the social work professionals and, in turn, to reconsider the curriculum of social work specifically with respect to community practice. Community is defined as *"a social unit based on common location, interests, identification, culture, and/or activities".* (Wertheimer, M. et al., 2004) With this definition, school can be considered as a community. Collaborative partnership with schools can lead to gaining new knowledge and skills for the profession considering that this setting is not a common social work arena.

Furthermore, the creation of a social work practice model regarding children participation in school governance would not just provide guidance to schools in creating an enabling environment to facilitate meaningful participation of children but, in the process, would translate the commitment of the profession to promote human rights and social change into practice.

Nicolas (2024) emphasized that the model-building process is similar to that of the planned change process. A practice model or intervention model are means for theories to be applied in practice. (Nicolas, 2024, citing Teater, 2015). It may be a combination of different models, which are influenced by certain theoretical approaches, which result in a new model. In summary, the model-building process includes the preparation, analysis, problem identification, model development, testing, enhancement and adoption. (Nicolas, 2024) The Theory of Change was used as the main tool in using the results of the study, which serves a situational analysis, and in developing a social work practice model.

Theory of Change

Following the results of the study, this paper proposes a model in hopes of addressing the concern on the SPG's lack of representation in school governing councils and other barriers to children's participation. It intends to make the president and vice president of the student government participate in the SGC in one (1) year. To achieve this desired outcome, the Theory of Change (TOC) is utilized. *Figure 1* provides description and illustration of the process in attaining the long-term goal of the model. Table 5 summarizes the assumptions purported for the achievement of the outcomes, while table 6 summarizes the proposed social work interventions.

In the TOC process, one main assumption in fulfilling the desired intermediate outcomes is having a social worker working for a child-focused organization and promoting children's rights. The organization collaborates with DepEd through the Division Office (DO) for a project on enhancing children's participation in school governance. The social worker then conducts orientation regarding the project and establishes partnership with DO. With the assumption that DO agrees with and accepts the project, it would disseminate information to the school through DO memorandum. The assumption is that the school would be interested in the proposed project. The social worker then conducts orientation with the key people in school. He or she would lay down the rationale, objectives, benefits, and processes that are expected in the project. In this activity, the school, through the school head, would be encouraged to partner with the organization for the proposed project. In accordance with DepEd protocols, the social worker facilitates the memorandum of agreement signing. Upon signing of a memorandum of agreement, the school is assumed to pass a memorandum announcing the partnership.

Once the partnership is settled, the social worker conducts ground work to get to know the relevant stakeholders on the field. Through this, the social worker invites SPG and other club presidents

to attend a workshop on assessing children's situation in school. The assumption is that, in the process, SPG and other club presidents will provide their consent and attend the 3-day workshop. Prior to the actual conduct of the workshop, the social worker prepares the design of the workshop and session guides. He or she will facilitate the workshop as well. With the participation of SPG and other club presidents, they will identify children's situation in school and set their priority agenda. Child participation is assumed to be part of the issues identified by SPG and club presidents. During the workshop, orientation on children's rights, other school related policies and the role of coordinating council will be conducted by the social worker as well. Having known the issue of participation and importance of coordinating council in ensuring this right in school, SGC and Club presidents are assumed to establish the coordinating council. The setting of agenda and the establishment of coordinating council will enable the presentation of the results of the workshop to relevant stakeholders. It is assumed that part of the SPG and Club presidents' agenda is to voice their situation and plans, and to garner support from key people in school. Hence, they will agree to conduct consultation meetings with SPG advisers, GPTA, and CPC. SPG adviser is at the top of the list of invited stakeholders since it is assumed that he or she already supports SPG in some ways. The GPTA is considered because their primary role in school is to provide support to pupils. On the other hand, CPC is seen as a potential supporter of SPG given that it promotes children's rights. Nonetheless, some of the following key people mentioned are assumed to be part of the SGC. In preparation for the consultation meeting, the social worker's activities involve ground working, conduct of preparation meetings with SPG and Club presidents, and assisting SPG in their presentation.

After presenting the priority issues and agenda, SPG calls for support among the stakeholders invited. In this process, the social worker and SPG will be able to identify who are the potential child's rights advocates (CRA) among the invited stakeholders. Agreements in this meeting will be documented and serve as reference of SPG and the social worker for planning the next steps.

After the consultation meeting, the social worker conducts ground working and meetings with the identified CRAs. It is assumed that through this activity, potential CRAs would commit themselves to support the agenda of SPG. Once the list of CRAs is finalized, the social worker conducts workshops with CRAs to plan on how to support SPG and how to address them. However, it is important that CRA attends training on children's rights, positive discipline and other school related policies to be able to produce plans that are child-friendly and in tune with the promotion of children's rights. While the CRAs undergo training, the SPG also attends training on organizational and project management. This is necessary for them to understand the project management cycle in school and management related work expected in an organization. Being equipped with that information would enable better participation from them in the next activity. For the capacity-building activities, the social worker will conduct training needs assessment, module development, scoping of resource persons, and facilitation during the training.

As the CRAs accomplished their plans and the SPG completed the training, a workshop to harmonize the existing agenda of SPG to the newly developed plan of CRAs will be conducted. To ensure their participation in the workshop, the social worker must do ground working. It is assumed that lobbying will be part of the harmonized plan and agenda of CRAs and SPG. Hence, the social worker must conduct training on negotiation and advocacy skills for CRAs and training on communication and public speaking for SPG. These trainings are assumed to equip CRAs and SPG with beginning competence on communication and advocacy skills to be able to lobby effectively to the SGC. It is also assumed that CRAs and SPG have little or no experience on advocacy work. Therefore, these capacity-building activities are recommended. In preparation for the training, the social worker must conduct training needs assessment, module development, and scoping of resource persons. He or she will facilitate the training as well.

The lobbying efforts of CRAs with the campaigns of SPG is assumed to move and encourage SGC members to attend a consultation meeting with them. The campaigns of SPG include writing of children's right to participate in school papers, posting of children's issues in school bulletin boards, etc. It is acknowledged that the claims-making process may expose SPG to child protection related issues because of the negative attitude of adults towards children. Thus, it is crucial that the CRAs provide support to SPG throughout the process.

The attendance of SGC to the consultation meeting with CRAs and SPG would enable the presentation of children's issues and agenda. Through the social worker's conduct of ground working and preparation meetings, the SPG will successfully lead the discussion on children's situation and their prioritized agenda while the CRAs will present the right of children to participate and its benefit in school governance. The whole claims-making process during the consultation meeting would convince SGC that SPG should have representation in the school governing process. The social worker then continues to assist CRAs and SPG in lobbying for the institutionalization of the representation of SPG

in SGC. This will result in the creation and passage of policy regarding SPG's participation in SGC. The policy will enable the attainment of the long-term goal – that the president and vice president of the Supreme Pupil Government participate in the School Governing Council.

In addition, to ensure the quality of participation of SPG, monitoring and evaluation of the nine (9) basic requirements will be conducted all throughout the process. The policy that will be developed will also provide provision for development of mechanisms that not just ensures children's participation in school governing matters and processes but always take into consideration the quality and meaningful participation from children.

Figure 1: Theory of Change
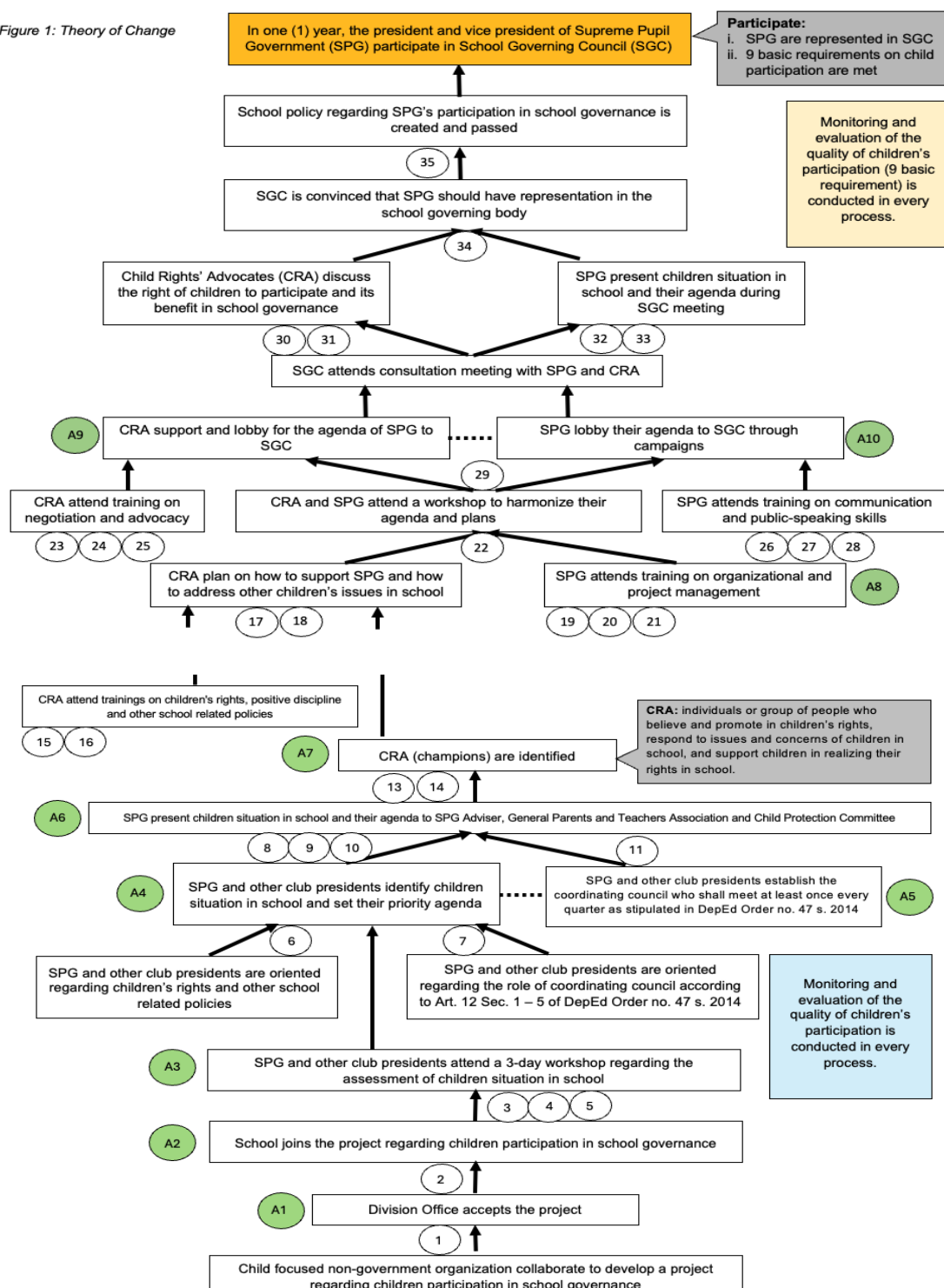
Source: Author's creation

LEGENDS:

Table 5. TOC Assumptions

	Assumption
A1	DO approves the proposed project and passes a DepEd Memorandum announcing the project to the schools.
A2	School express its willingness to partner with the organization and agrees with the goal of the project. Upon signing of memorandum of agreement, the school will pass a memorandum announcing the partnership.
A3	SPG and other club presidents will provide their consent and attend to the 3-day workshop.
A4	SPG and other club presidents will identify children participation in school governing council as part of their issue during the workshop.
A5	SPG and other club presidents will realize the need to establish coordinating council and carry it in their agenda in response to their priority issues.
A6	Lobbying support to GPTA and CPC becomes part of the agenda of the SPG and other club presidents to address children's priority issues.
A7	Champions will be identified from GPTA and CPC. They will be called Child's Rights Advocates. Some CRA are members of the SGC.
A8	SPG will understand how projects are managed in school and how to run their organization as well as the coordinating council.
A9	CRA have beginning competence on negotiation and advocacy skills to lobby children's agenda to the entire members of SGC.
A10	SPG have beginning competence on communication and public speaking skiils to lobby their agenda.

Source: Author's creation

Table 6. TOC Interventions

INTERVENTIONS & ACTIVITIES					
Organizing and mobilizing		**Capacity-building**		**Campaign and Advocacy**	
3,8, 13,22, 30, 32	Ground working	15,19, 23, 26	Conduct training needs assessment and module development	1	Conduct orientation regarding the project
4,17	Designing the workshop	16, 21, 25, 28	Conduct training	2	Establish partnership
5, 18	Conduct of workshop	7, 20, 24, 27	Invite resource person	29, 34	Assist SPG & CRA in lobbying
9, 31, 33	Conduct preparation meetings	6, 7	Conduct orientation regarding children's rights	35	Assist SPG & CRA in monitoring the passage of school memorandum regarding SPG representation in SGC
11,14	Conduct consultation or follow-up meetings				
10	Assist SPG & Club presidents in the preparation of activity/ies				

Source: Author's creation

Enhancing Children's Participation in School Governance through a Social Work Practice Model

With the analysis of the problem presented in the study and the utilization of TOC, a child-centered model was developed in response to the lack of representation of SPG in the school governing body. *Figure 2* illustrates the social work practice model. The model follows the helping process in working with communities – engagement, assessment & planning, implementation, and termination and evaluation. As discussed in the theory of change, the **engagement** of the worker in the school is through

the partnership between a child-focused organization and a Department of Education (DepEd) Division Office.

For the **assessment**, the student would abide the principles of children's rights and the tenets of children participation. Children through the SPG and other club members would be involved in a workshop to assess children's situation in school. The tools and activities utilized in this proposal can be applied for the children's assessment. Other techniques relevant to assess the situation of children would also be administered. Part of the issues which will be explored further in the assessment is children participation in school governance. The assessment would guide the agenda setting of the student governing body. This is an initial step in **planning** the strategies and approach in institutionalizing the representation of SPG in the school governing body.

Community or school organizing and mobilization are the primary intervention of the model. Two **organizing** activity shall be implemented – organizing for adult support and for the coordinating council. Other supporting activities in organizing and mobilization are conduct of capacity-building, and campaign and advocacy. For the monitoring and evaluation (M&E), indicators of success in each outcome and the process of M&E shall be identified during the planning process with the CRA and SPG. Also, the nine (9) basic requirement of children participation would be part of the indicators. The model aims to assist school in ensuring that SPG participate in SGC in a year. The attainment of the objective shall be the basis for termination.

Figure 3: Social Work Practice Model
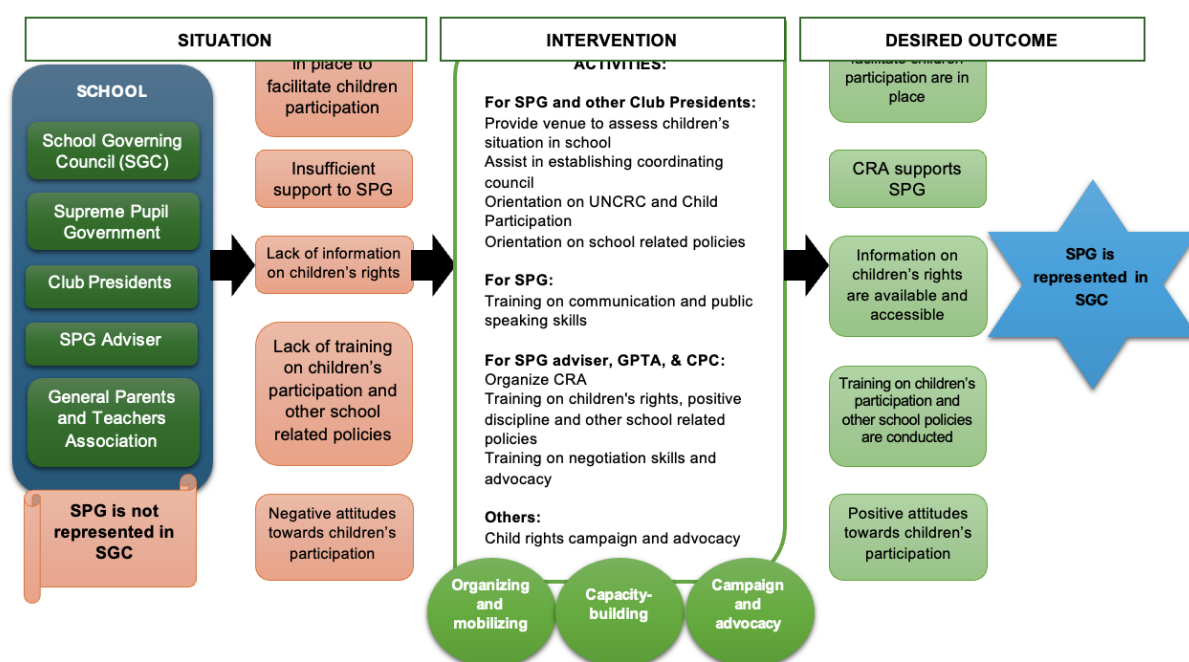
Source: Author's creation

Conclusion and Suggestions
Conclusion

Children's participation in school remains to be a contentious concept and practice. Despite its relevance in promoting children's rights and equipping future generations for democratic and public governance and citizenship participation, meaningful participation and representation of student leaders in school governance have yet to be seen and realized. The Philippines, being a signatory of the UNCRC, has passed significant laws to protect and promote children's rights including the right to participation. The Department of Education has also enacted policies that are supportive and cognizant of children participation in schools through the establishment of student government and the opportunities to engage them in management and policy decision-making at the school-based management level. However, it is important to recognize that there may be several barriers to meaningful children participation such as cultural beliefs, lack of capacity to promote and support children participation, and lack of adult support. Social and cultural notions on children ascribing them

as secondary to adults affect adult perceptions to the ability of children to actually contribute to matters that affect. It is imperative then to address these notions by continuing stakeholder education on children's rights, emphasizing the importance of enriching the evolving capacities of children, and their right to be heard and involved. Adult support for children's participation is also essential to provide a safe environment for children to participate meaningfully. Children having adult support companions and having adults who recognize their rights in a meeting room will help encourage safe conversations. Adult support companions may also assist in preparing children for negative feedback or criticisms. Hence, the student government will benefit from the increase of adult support and the capability-building of school stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and administrators, to provide a supportive and enabling environment for children participation. The continuous advocacy on children's rights in family, schools, and communities remains to be relevant to transform society to become more child-friendly and child-rights-enabling environment.

Suggestions

The social work profession in the Philippines, bearing a generalist and integrative practice, has the potential to contribute to advancing children's rights in schools through collaborative efforts with educators and child development workers. Although public schools in the Philippines do not employ social workers, this paper is an attempt to recommend a social work practice model to enhance children's participation in schools through school/community organizing, capability-building, and campaign and advocacy.

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Author's Brief Biography

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