

**LEARNERS' UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR RIGHT TO  
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

by

Willem Johannes van Vollenhoven

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FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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Willem Johannes van Vollenhoven

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Supervisor: Professor Dr JL Beckmann  
Co-supervisor: Professor Dr AS Blignaut

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**DECLARATION**

**“I declare that the thesis which I hereby submit  
for the degree**

**PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR**

**IN**

**EDUCATION MANAGEMENT**

**at the University of Pretoria, is my own work  
and has not previously been submitted by me for  
a degree at this or any other tertiary institution”.**

---

**Willem Johannes van Vollenhoven**

**Signed on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2005  
Pretoria, South Africa**

## **Ethics statement**

## Taalversorging

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to

- my dear mother, who takes pride in the achievements of her children, my precious family and my late father whose name I carry and strive to uphold;
- Pieter, my lifelong source of inspiration who is helping me to complete the “Constitution of Life”;
- the drafters of the Constitution for allowing me to research freedom of expression passionately; and
- the learners of South Africa. May your freedom of expression always be treasured!

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Thesis	Learners' understanding of their right to freedom of expression in South Africa

\* Available on CD-ROM

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACHR	American Convention on Human Rights
APA	American Psychological Association
CAQDAS	Computer-aided qualitative data analysis software
CODESA	Congress for a Democratic South Africa
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DoE	Department of Education
ECHR	European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
GETC	General Education and Training Certificate
HRC	Human Rights Commission
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
LRC	Learners' Representative Council
LSD	Lysergic Acid Diethylamide
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NP	National Party
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
S	State
S. Ct.	Supreme Court
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SASA	South African Schools Act
SNCC	Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee
SPLC	Student Press Law Center
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UDIHR	Universal Declaration of Islamic Human Rights
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNC	United Nations Charter
US	United States
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

## Abstract

Newspapers often report on the violation of learners' rights. Many of these violations and critical incidents are related to the right to freedom of expression, which is internationally viewed as a core right in a democracy. My inquiry focused on grade 11 learners' understanding of the right to freedom of expression. It is important to understand learners' understanding of the right to freedom of expression, as they are the leaders of tomorrow and the right to freedom of expression is central to the survival of democracy. This inquiry was informed by an interpretivist paradigm. Atlas.ti™ was used to systematically analyse the data and categorise it into three hermeneutic units. This computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) tool facilitated the process of analysis and enhanced the validity of the research. During the inductive process of analysis two patterns crystallised, viz. the absolutising of the right to freedom of expression by some learners and the lack of skills to implement the limitation to the right to freedom of expression in schools.

The main findings indicated that some learners did not have knowledge regarding the right to freedom of expression, although most learners were aware that they could speak their minds under this right. Furthermore, learners didn't seem to know how to exercise the right to freedom of expression. One of the factors disrupting the implementation of the right to freedom of expression in schools is the perpetuation of an authoritarian culture in schools. Theoretical and practical recommendations are suggested and avenues for future research are identified.

## Keywords

freedom of expression  
democracy  
absolutising  
limitation  
core right

artistic expression  
symbolic expression  
religious expression  
authoritarianism  
understanding