



Erasmus Mundus Master's Program in Social Work with Families and Children

Children's perceptions of participation: a study using Forum Theatre

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Abstract:

Key words: Child participation; Forum Theatre; voice; empowerment; social work

Over the recent years there has been growing acceptance that eliciting and advocating the voice of children is of great importance directly connected to the work of social workers. There is extensive literature on the benefits of child participation which include strengthening personal and social development and promoting a more democratic society. However there is reason to believe that child participation is somewhat ineffective. To tackle this, adults have to be aware of their responsibilities but the lack of awareness and thus literature on what children think when it comes to participation should be addressed.

Using an experimental Forum Theater method, this study strives to elicit the views on children on their understanding and exercise of their right to participate. Overall 10 children aged 6-12 participated in three Forum Theatre workshops that resulted in a Forum Theater play which was presented three times to an audience, the results of which are described and analyzed. Content analysis and in vivo coding was used to present the children's views and the underlying emancipatory processes they go through.

The results of this study add to previous literature demonstrating that children are capabilities of understand and exercising participation as a right, as a form of citizenship and as an act of empowerment stressing at the same time in the need for a safe place where children can be encouraged to reflect but also be empowered to take action for change. The importance of co- learning between youth and adults that can facilitate critical dialogue, awareness and skills that lead to critical consciousness is also emphasized.

This study is an exemplar of an innovative, democratizing and effective methodology that might profitably be utilized in social work with children and families. Finally, departing from the findings suggestions are made as to how child participation can be made to be more effective.

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1. Introduction

“Seek children’s perspectives, recognizing them as people with dignity and evolving capacities; that they are empowered and assisted to speak out, have their views heard and become an integral part of processes of change.”

Getting it Right for Children, Save the Children, 2007

This study focuses on children’s perception of participation by applying the method of Forum Theatre to elicit the children’s views and empower them into taking action for change.

The first chapter consists of a personal perspective and reasoning for the choice of this subject and how the researcher considers it essential in the process of social change. Then, the research questions and objectives are presented, followed by the significance of the study and ends with the scope of the study.

1.1 Personal perspective and motivation to take this study

Children’s right to participate in matters concerning their lives is nothing new. Many scholars have tried to reach the most effective forms by coming up with models, conducting research and evaluating projects, to ensure that children are participating and by this way are developing their cognitive and social skills to have the base to lead their lives to its fullest potential.

Having worked with children in different contexts and positions for more than 10 years, I have become aware from first hand of how easy it is to look at children and matters concerning them from an adult perspective, how easy it is to put all children in categories according to age and how there is an unconscious tendency to regard one’s own best interest as the best interest of a child.

Growing up in a southern European context, I never had the chance to reflect on this matter before; I myself was put in a category according to my age, to my sex, to my capacities that in my mind were mostly connected to my performance at school. I would have probably continued the pattern I followed in my upbringing with my own children as it is embodied and normalized as a cultural fact. But during the second semester of this master in Norway, I was given the opportunity to see children and their rights to participation from a different perspective, a perspective that was much more empowering and a way of “doing” child participation that seems to be working.

One might question the selection of doing this study in Portugal, a country that is a part of the “northern world”. Most children have their basic needs for survival covered and most probably are aware of their right to participate. But as in Portugal and also in the rest of the world, are we making sure that children fully understand their rights? Do we make sure they comprehend the value? When coming up with new theories, models and “effective” projects, do we listen to what children have to say?

We are living in times of social change. More and more people are fighting for and winning their rights, more and more women, members of the LGBT community, refugees,

immigrants and many more are trying to fight against the system in an attempt to make this a better and more inclusive world. On the other hand, more and more oppression by the sociopolitical system that can be seen by the impact of the economic recession, change in governments and so on. To obtain the best results in both cases, effective citizenship as well as critical thinking should be exercised by the people, something that should be taught from very early on. In fact, children as a group themselves actually suffer from stereotypes which oppress them, an oppression that is hidden behind facts like age, maturity and the barrios which these facts reinforce.

Forum Theatre is in essence a tool, ideal when wanting to work on participatory issues. Working with oppression, especially in the case of children, it is much easier to get through to them through play. Forum Theatre combines the two most important ingredients, that of initiating a process of social change in a collective and fun way.

Bringing up children that have critical thinking, that question things around them and have the space to articulate their opinion in any way they want are the main ingredients for a better tomorrow, resilient children, resilient adults, resilient society.

1.2 Problem statement and research questions

Over the recent years there has been growing acceptance that children and young people should be more involved in decision making affecting their lives (Kirby et al, 2003). The benefits of this include strengthening personal and social development that promotes in turn a more democratic society (Checkoway, 2011). There is extensive literature on models and theories including raising awareness on the limitations that restrict participation in children. It is interesting to see that even with all the literature and the studies, still participation remains to some extent ineffective. There is a tendency to explain the ineffectiveness using concepts such as age and development to justify the inefficiency (Freeman, 2007; Therborn, 1996; Vandebroek and Bouverne-De Bie, 2006 in Reynaert et al, 2009). Even Article 12 of the CRC speaks of age and capabilities of children when forming their views. Being aware of our responsibility as adults when it comes to child participation is important but there is a lack of awareness and thus literature on what children think when it comes to participation. Wilkinson (2001) states the importance of including children in the research procedures in order to bring meaningful change we have to measure properly how effective we are by simply asking them.

There is a need for a safe place where children can be encouraged to reflect but also be empowered to take action for change. If we don't know their perceptions on the limitations how can we help? When talking about participation, Zimmerman (2000) emphasizes the importance of co-learning between youth and adults that can facilitate critical dialogue, awareness and skills that lead to critical consciousness. But how can we talk about co-learning in child participation if we don't have feedback from the children? How aware are they of their right to participate and how affected they are by the limitations found in the literature in practice? How do they perceive the current situation of their lives?

Having said the above, the research questions that this study seeks to answer are: 1. What are children's perceptions regarding participation? ; 2. What can make child participation more effective?

The general objectives of this study are to look at children's understanding and experience in participating in matters concerning them by using the tool of Forum Theatre and at the same observe them participate in the study and thus explore what can be taken into consideration to make child participation more effective.

1.3 Study significance

This study is significant because of its innovative nature. Looking at children's views represents the essence of participation and by doing this the limitations are understood from a different point of view. This study offers a different perspective of that of categorizing children according to age and cognitive development; instead of waiting for children to grow up, it urges to meet them half way and reach effective child participation earlier. In addition, it does not stop at making sure that children reflect but takes it a step further by empowering them to effect change.

Empowering children

This research strives to empower children reflect and share their thoughts and feelings as well as helping them to be aware of limitations that are out of their hands. By empowering children to effect change, they can develop self- belief in their ability to influence outcomes (Kirby et al, 2003). This study helps children realize their rights, not only giving them the information but going a step further by helping them assume their power and in this way to be liberated from the responsibility of the "un- effectiveness".

An alternative approach to understanding the connection between perceived control and behavior is to focus on the positive consequences of exerting control, what Zimmerman (1990) calls "learned hopefulness". Learned hopefulness suggests that experiences that provide opportunities to enhance perceived control will help individuals cope with stress and solve problems in their personal lives (ibid.). As Sewpaul (2013) notes, "...sometimes even a single word or observation can open our eyes and make us question and alter the ideas and values that we have grown up with" (p.119).

Benefits for social work practice and future research

Being aware of the ways we see children and "do" child participation is essential in social workers practice in both preventative and actual case work. It assumes a strengths perspective approach. Through this study, social workers can become more aware of what makes child participation limiting from the eyes of the children. A critical reflection on one's own thinking, on one's social and political realities and the capacity to develop action strategies consequent upon these reflections is central to development and cannot occur only through macro- level interventions. When working towards effective child participation, on the one hand, social workers have to be able to communicate effectively with children no matter their

age to help them express their views in every context of their lives and emancipate them to do so (Sewpaul and Ntini, 2015). On the other hand, it is our duty to help shape the environment of these children to also be ready for the children to exercise their right.

This research also attempts to fill in the gap in literature on child perspective on participation and offers a base to work more in- depth through future studies. It also adds to the limited research of the use of Forum Theatre with children.

Benefits for society

By empowering children to use their right of participation in matters affecting their lives there is an extended advantage for society that benefits from the views of this group that are socially sensitive and interested in issues such as racism, sexism and so on (Covell et al, 2008). On the other hand, by cultivating the sense of citizenship in the children from a young age reflects on them as responsible citizens as adults. Investment in education and emotional wellbeing of children implies positive returns for all society (Esping-Andersen, 2009).

1.4 Scope of the study

This study explores how children see their right to participate. It is based on Freire and his ideas of raising consciousness. It employs an exploratory design using qualitative methods. It looks at children's perception of participation through the method of Forum Theatre and strives to add to the existing literature regarding effective child participation.

Firstly a review of the literature on participation is done to clarify the concepts connected to participation and to point out the strong and weak points of the most famous models. These weak points are especially looked at as they are the main limitations found to be making child participation ineffective. Then, to elicit the children's views on participation, 6 Forum Theatre sessions were realized with a group of 12 children in Lisbon, followed up by 6 interviews at the end of the project.

2. Literature review

The present chapter strives to clarify the topic of participation as well the concepts linked to it. It explains its importance and presents the most influential models up to date in the field. A brief evaluation of each model strives to point out the limitations which are then discussed further in detail providing a theoretical explanation of the oppression in child participation.

2.1 What is child participation?

Participation is a multi-layered concept, with the same term often used to describe very different processes (Kirby et al, 2003). Despite it being widely used, what is actually meant by participation is still not clear. The term is used to describe different forms of social engagement such as participation in a conversation, in games, in cultural activities, as a sense of belonging within a family or community or the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, where it is embodied in Article 12 to express views freely and have them taken seriously, along with the other key civil rights to freedom of expression, religion, conscience, association and information, and the right to privacy (Lansdown, 2010). Therefore it is important to look at the ways in which the term is being used in this research.

Child participation means that children are able to make and express their opinion and at the same time be a part of the solution in problems that are affecting them. It is related to the child's role in society and citizenship as it's not only a matter of expressing their opinion but also influencing their environment (Cussianovich, 2009, in Padilla & Rivera- Holguin, 2015). Hart (1992) defines it as a process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured (Malone & Hartung, 2010). At this point it is important to clarify that participation does not mean self- determination. Self-determination is taking responsibility for decisions. Participation is a matter of being involved in the decision making process (Lansdown, 1995).

2.1.1 Participation as a right

When we talk about rights, one's thought goes firstly to basic needs and the necessity to cover these especially for children in poverty, living in war zones or countries affected by environmental problems (Alderson, 2008). Yet a child's right to participation is as important no matter the context. The first declaration of rights was adopted by the International Save the Children Union in Geneva in 1923 and was endorsed by the League of Nations General Assembly in 1924, as the World Child Welfare Charter. The Declaration of the Rights of the Child was proclaimed by the United Nations in 1959 (Checkoway, 2011). However the focus was on the welfare and protection of children- not their participation. The discourse on children's participation appeared in the preparation of the CRC where many nations had reservations about the participation Articles in the CRC, and have since had difficulties realizing these in practice (Smith and Lødrup 2004; Verhellen and Weyts, 2003; Sandberg, 2003 found in Skivenes, M. & Strandbu, A., 2006).

Article 12, no. 1 in the CRC: *States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*

What this right covers is that children should have the necessary information about their options and consequences related to these options so that they can make informed and free decisions (Checkoway, 2011). Having said this, the first and foremost step is to acknowledge child participation as a fundamental human right as important as any other, that children are entitled to and should be able to exercise effectively.

2.1.2 Child participation as an active process of empowering children in decisions affecting their lives

Participation is seen as an act; the action of participating in decisions, speaking and generally taking active part in the community. But participation is also linked to the internal process of feeling capable to act and thinking in a critical manner about the ways to practice the right. By participating, children understand that it is possible for them to make a difference (Lansdown, 2011). When children are denied participation, it is unlikely that they can conceive of themselves as moral persons able to shape their environments (Covell et al, 2008).

As mentioned above, empowerment has two sides to it, a more practical and a more conceptual. On the one hand, empowering through the practice of participation has been linked to high degrees of self- esteem and competence as well as self- efficiency (Teater, 2014). On the other hand empowerment can be derived from the awareness that comes from peoples understanding of how their circumstances are shaped not only by their behavior but also broader social forces (Freire 2003 in Wong et al, 2010).

There are three interconnected dimensions of empowerment, which consist of the following: (1) the development of a more positive sense of self; (2) the construction of knowledge and capacity for more critical comprehension of social and political realities of one's environment; (3) the cultivation of resources and strategies, or more functional competence, for attainment of personal and collective social goals, or liberation'. Therefore, individuals, groups or communities are to be critically conscious and have knowledge of the oppression they experience which leads to power and the ability to take control (Lee, 1996, in Teater, 2014).

2.1.3 Participation as citizenship

There is large debate whether children can be seen as active citizens. This is because they are regarded as being amongst the most vulnerable members of society and are denied basic civil rights (Cloke & Davies, 1995). But from adolescence on, these children are suddenly expected to behave in a socially involved manner, to be independent and responsible (Jans, 2004).

According to Delanty (2000) found in Jans (2004), one or more of the following four elements defines citizenship: Citizenship as a whole of rights; Citizenship as a whole of responsibilities; Citizenship as identity; Citizenship as participation.

When looking at each element, it is clear that there are some issues that have to be addressed. For example, full citizenship for children can only be when they have the same rights as adults but e.g. children can't vote. Their playful character can make some doubt how responsible they can be and their need for protection comes in the way of society participation (Jans, 2004). On the other hand though, children seem to possess the ability to identify themselves with larger social groups and communities. Because of the progressive way in which children appropriate their environment, at first mainly local forms of citizenship are within the reach of children (ibid.).

But humans are social creatures whose practices are social activities. Children actually participate in society; they have the status of citizens, for as far as we can see citizenship as participation and involvement (Jans, 2004). Childhood and the living conditions of children are fundamentally influenced by the same economic, political and social powers that constitute the context of adults' lives. These determine the living conditions of children as well and the social construction of childhood (ibid.). The participation and involvement approach especially offers the opportunity for the design of children-sized citizenship. In former days, citizenship used to be a static given and the final destination of childhood (Kirby et al, 2003). But it is the actual experience of participating in an early age that will shape the citizenship they show as adults in the future.

The question should not be if children should be regarded as active citizens though, rather how citizenship can be adapted to children. How can we see this social involvement, together with other abilities children have, as a basis for actual citizenship and not only as a basis for future citizenship (Jans, 2004)?

A good example could be citizenship education in schools. A key component of this is broadened opportunities for meaningful participation for the children (Covell et al, 2008). The main aim of this education is to give the values, skills and knowledge in order to act in a socially and morally responsible manner (Arthur, 2005 in Covell et al, 2008). The defining criterion of success is evidence that youth are understanding, accepting and acting on their responsibility towards others.

There is growing evidence that when children are respected as citizens they demonstrate the values, skills and behaviors that define active citizenship. Children who are taught about their rights and responsibilities in a place where these rights are respected by allowing meaningful participation are children who display moral and socially responsible behaviors and feel empowered to act (Howe & Covell, 2007 in Covell et al, 2008).

2.2 Benefits of effective child participation

From what has been mentioned so far as well as from the work of several scholars, it is clear that the benefits of participation in children are numerous. It is essential on many levels, for the child as an individual, it's relation to others but also many benefits for the community in a whole or society (Kirby et al, 2003).

Positive youth development

As stated by the UNCRC (2009b), participating is a mechanism that promotes the ‘full development of the personality’. Children develop capacities that help them in participating in more meaningful relationships, experiences and opportunities (Bruyere, 2010). Kirby et al, (2003) finds that through effective participation, children’s independence is improved; they are more confident and show increased responsibility for their actions.

Participation also benefits children’s protection. When children are encouraged to speak up they are less vulnerable to abuse and better able to contribute towards their own protection instead of passive obedience that can make children vulnerable to exploitation and abuse (Lansdown, 2005). Giving them information and opportunities to participate in decisions can empower them to challenge abuse and in this way help the adults by speaking up and sharing information that is will help in protecting them better (ibid.).

Relations with other children and adults

Participation not only allows a child to have a voice but it also enables children to discover the rights of others to have their own very different voices (Hart, 1992). Positive relationships with peers, parents and professionals have been noticed when involving young people in decision-making as well as enhanced group skills such as improvements in communication, listening and leadership (Kirby et al, 2003).

Personal development and autonomy is achieved through collaboration with others (Hart, 1992). Hart provides the example of Piaget’s game of marbles that demonstrated how cooperation and mutual agreement between equals is necessary for the development of autonomy. The findings showed that children learn not by accepting the authority of one of the players regarding the rules, but by developing the rules in a cooperative way through discussion; hearing different children’s views leads to them reaching their own consensus. By always being subjected to authority they don’t learn mutual respect and thus cannot develop autonomous selves. The blooming of a personality through the development of autonomy depends then on these social relationships (ibid.).

An additional benefit of child participation is the increased adults’ awareness of children’s needs, opinions and wishes. Adults learn how to share power with children, how to understand children’s views and realize young people’s great potential and how much knowledge and sensibility children have on different topics (Kränzl-Nagl and Zartler, 2010). Children, for example, are strikingly sensitive about global social themes like the environment and peace. Society, however, mainly plays upon this in an educational way. This sensibility of children is mainly considered as a solid base for future citizenship and only rarely as a base for actual citizenship (Covell et al, 2008).

Good for society

Child participation benefits society as a whole by helping children to develop social competence and responsibility (Hart, 1992). They learn from the beginning how to behave in a socially and morally responsible way towards authority and towards each other (Gearon, 2003). There is a need for children, from the earliest ages, to experience the implications of democratic decision-making and to acquire the capacities for non-violent conflict resolution (Lansdown, 2005).

When it comes to teaching children political self-determination, there is a tendency of being more concerned with political indoctrination, rather than encouraging critical debate which allows children to establish their own beliefs. The creation of a patriotic sense of citizenship by offering a fixed set of beliefs is regarded necessary by many schools in order to establish a stable, democratic form of government (Hart, 1992). But by cultivating participation, children are protected from the risk of alienation and manipulation. Through genuine participation, young people develop the skills of critical reflection and comparison of perspectives which are essential to the self-determination of political beliefs (ibid.). Being involved in decision-making processes can provide the understanding of political structures and in this way motivate them to take part in different forms of politics- either now or in the future. The IEA Civic Education Study concluded that students in schools that use more democratic processes are more likely to vote as adults than other students (Torney-Purta et al. cited in Hannam, 2003 found in Kirby et al, 2003).

Supporting a child's right to be heard in the early years is essential in cultivating citizenship over the long term. In this way, the values of democracy are embedded in the child's approach to life that is far more effective than a sudden transfer of power at the age of 18 (Lansdown, 2005).

2.3 Models of child participation

The culture of participation, the role of the theories and the influence they have had in the field of child participation are of great importance when attempting to move forward, theories and models that are often used interchangeably in the discourse and practice of child participation (Malone & Hartung, 2010). Along the years many models have been built in an attempt to describe in the best way child participation in the context of child and adult interaction, project categorization, some using hierarchy, others non-linear schemes all aiming to reach a common, universal understanding to help practitioners and researchers to realize the different dimensions connected to child participation. As it can be seen from the above, participation can be understood in different ways making it very important to be aware of what we strive towards and act accordingly as well as to reflect if what we think is child participation or *effective* child participation. The following models will help create a notion of what has been presented in the field, pointing out the positive aspects of the models but also bringing to our attention the parts that if ignored could lead to ineffective child participation. Five models have been chosen with the first ones being very influential and the last including more recent research on the matter. In all models, the strong and weak aspects are pointed out and a focus is put on the limitations of these models that consequently can lead to

participation being ineffective or not carried out to its full potential in an intent to raise awareness in professionals making it the first step towards an ideal participatory model.

2.3.1 Hart's ladder of young people's participation

One of the first attempts to describe child participation came from Hart (1992) with his "ladder of children's participation" (Fig.1). Considered to be the most influential model within the field (Malone & Hartung, 2010), Hart's typology builds upon Arnstein's ladder metaphor (1969) and adapts the framework to produce a typology that depicts a stepwise progression of participation in the context of youth and adult interaction. Similar to Arnstein's ladder, Hart's typology includes varying degrees of participation and non-participation types organized in a linear fashion (Wong et al, 2010). It is comprised of eight rungs, with the bottom three 'manipulation', 'decoration', and 'tokenism' representing the non-participatory types and the top five representing varying degrees of participation, from projects that are assigned to children with informed roles to those that are initiated by youth (Malone & Hartung, 2010).

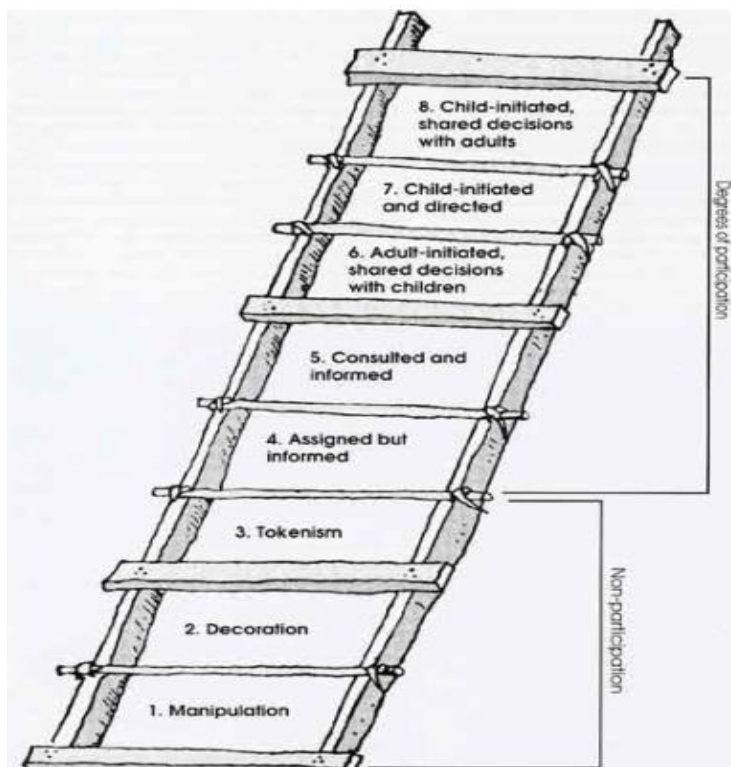


Figure 1: Hart's ladder of participation
Source: Hart, 1992

Shier (2001) suggests that a major contribution of Hart's typology was that there was nothing equivalent to the non-participatory levels in the ladder. He points out that many practitioners have found this to be the most useful function helping in being aware of these and working to

eliminate these non-participation types in their own practice and also help uncover how many activities and programs are designed at the non-participatory levels (Wong et al, 2010).

There are several major critiques of Hart's ladder. A narrow view on children's participation focusing mostly on projects and programs rather than on informal participation within the community and cultural limitations of the model are the most significant. Hart himself (2008), points out how his model is largely limited in describing the varying roles adults play in relation to children's participation. The placement of youth driven participation at the top of the ladder can under value the contributions and power sharing adults can lend to youth and community development (Wong et al, 2010). On the other hand, the cultural limitations of the model come from the fact that most of the authors writing about children's participation rely on Western theories of children's development while in countries where cultural norms are different the extent of child participation in communities, projects and informal interactions with adults are also different. Therefore, the ladder cannot be equally applied without reference and special attention to the cultural context on the country and the history of the interactions of in- between generations (Hart, 2008). Another limitation regards the misunderstanding the ladder metaphor insinuates of the necessary sequence to children's developing competence in participation and how the highest participation type (i.e., child initiated, shared decisions with adults) is the most desirable (Wong et al, 2010). Hart (2008) tries to clarify this by explaining that the ladder is primarily about the degree to which adults and institutions afford or enable the children to participate but recognizes that it is not at all surprising as the symbol used is interpreted as stepwise climbing.

2.3.2 Treseder's degrees of participation

Another typology was "Treseder's degrees of participation" (Fig.2), which offers an alternative model to the linear conception of participation. It consist of five different yet equal forms: (1) the assigned but informed, (2) the adult initiated, shared decisions with children, (3) the child initiated and directed,(4) the child initiated shared decisions with adults and (5) the consulted and informed.

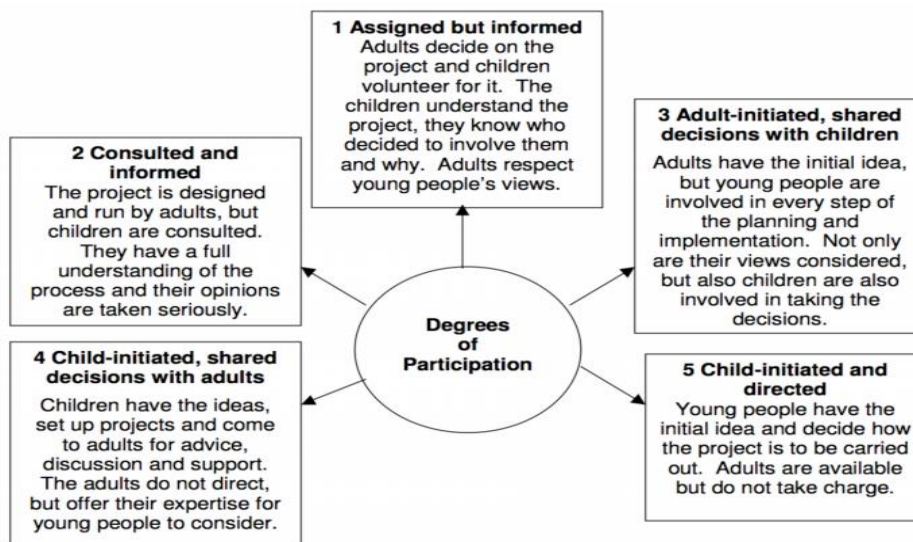


Figure 2: Treseder's degree of participation
Source: Treseder, 1997

This model is based on David Hodgson's five conditions that must be met for youth participation and empowerment to be achieved. Hodgson states in *Participation of children and young people in social work (1995)* that young people need (1) access to those in power as well as (2) access to relevant information, (3) there need to be real choices between different options, (4) they need support from a trusted, independent person, and (5) that there needs to be a means of appeal or complaint if anything goes wrong. Treseder uses the five degrees of participation in Hart's ladder but responds to some of the criticism the ladder has received. On the one hand, he steps away from the ladder to show that there is neither a progressive hierarchy nor a specific sequence in the way participation should be developed (Treseder, 1997). Hart's model implies that each rung is a progressive step towards the ideal: youth driven participation. Treseder argues that youth driven participation may be inappropriate in some cases and that it is instead more practical to use degrees that are non-linear to show that one type of participation is not more desired than another (Wong et. al, 2010). On the other hand, Treseder argues for the need to be no limit to the involvement of children and young people, but that they need to be empowered to be able to fully participate (Treseder, 1997).

Even though Treseder's model is a very useful framework for explaining many youth participation types, it doesn't include recent findings in youth- adult participation research (Wong et. al, 2010). For example, Camino (2000, 2005 quoted in Wong et al, 2010) found that activity quality and positive development outcomes were compromised when adults were not involved. The fact that children and youth lack connections and social capital can unintentionally disempower them. This finding suggests that the neutral representation of the participation types in Treseder's model underestimate the value that certain youth- adult participation arrangements can offer to the empowerment and positive development of youth (ibid).

2.3.3 Shier's pathways to participation

Shier's "pathways to participation" (Fig. 3) feature five levels of participation. It is to be used in tandem with Hart's five participatory types and is a tool that can be applied in almost all situations where adults work with children and to help them consider three stages of commitment-openings, opportunities and obligations-on each progressive participation level (Shier, 2001). The levels of participation according to Shier are: (1) Children are listened to, (2) Children are supported when expressing their views, (3) Children's views are taken into account, (4) Children are involved in decision making processes, (5) Children share power and responsibility for decision making. The model provides a sequence of 15 key questions as a tool that can be used to probe that current level of participation or planning participatory action with youth and adults (Wong et al, 2010).

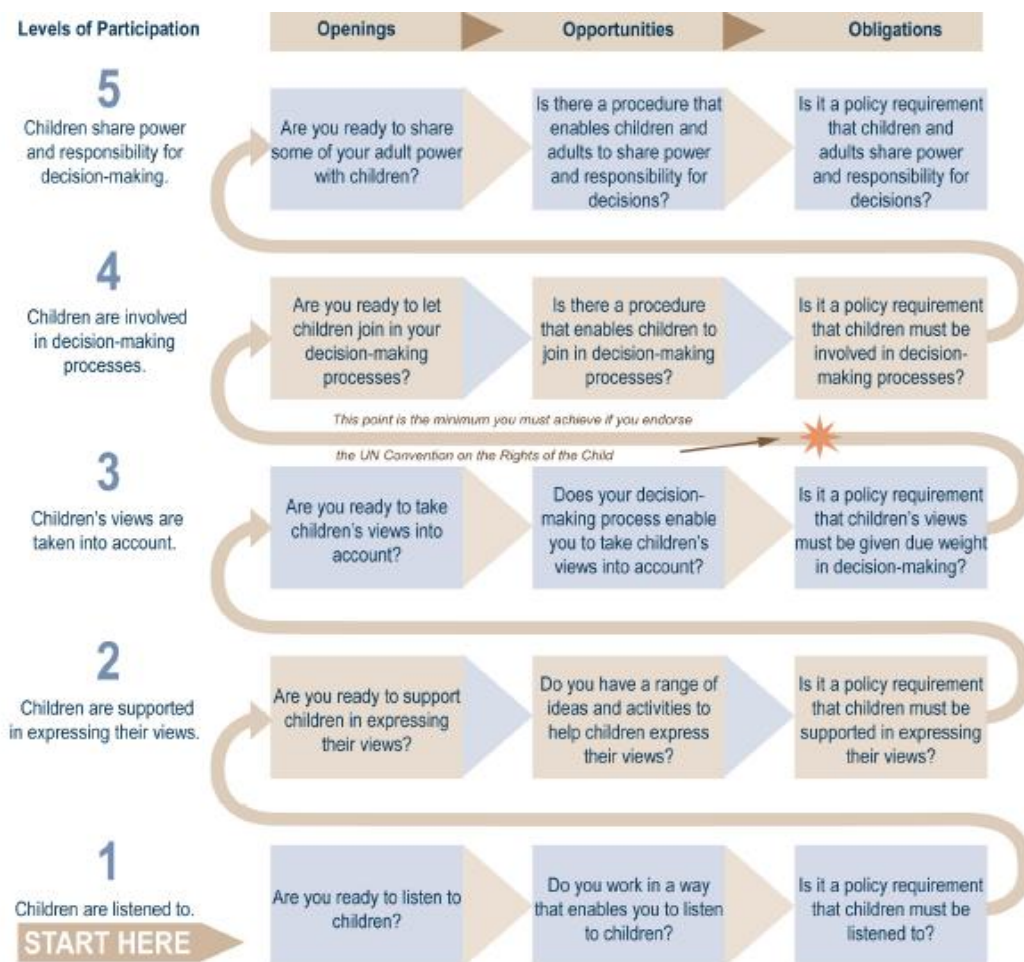


Figure 3: Shier's pathways to participation
Source: Adapted from Shier, (2001).

Shier offers a tool more than a model that helps keep practitioners aware of practical issues when working with children and youth. According to Shier (2001), at each level an *opening* occurs, that is a personal commitment or a decision to work in a certain way. Then, the second level, an *opportunity* shows itself when all the needs are met that allow the worker or

organization to work at this level. Needs could be resources, skills, knowledge or new approaches to established tasks. Last, an *obligation* is established when it becomes an agreed policy that the organization will be operating in this way. Thus, enabling child participation becomes built-in to the system. It is important to point out that Shier's pathways makes a direct link of child participation with the UNCRC placing Article 12 in the scheme. This is of great importance for two reasons, first because it identifies how policies and laws are directly connected to child participation and the extent to which effective participation is met and secondly, by placing the Article somewhere in the middle, Shier shows the need to go beyond the law and perhaps insinuates that the policy may be in need of modification.

Even though Shier's typology has a different viewpoint, still, it misses an opportunity to be a more comprehensive model that captures the full range of youth and adult arrangements that have implications for participation by not using Hart's non participatory types as well (Wong et al, 2010). Furthermore, the questions he uses as a tool are designed for adult responses. This adult centric framing underlines and further perpetuates the adult position of power. Although this adult bias represents a reality in many cases, a re- evaluation of youth-adult control can offer an alternative to conceptualize the relationships that allow both young people and adults to jointly determine roles, readiness and genuine shared control in participatory action research (ibid.).

2.3.4 Seven realms of participation

Francis and Lorenzo (2002) present a historical and critical review of children and youth participation in city planning and design. As an alternative and after a review of three decades worth of child participation in practice, they have identified seven realms under which most projects can be categorized: 1) 'romantic realm': children and young people as planners; 2) 'advocacy realm': planners for children and young people; 3) 'needs realm': social scientists for children and young people; 4) 'learning realm': children and young people as learners; 5) 'rights realm': children and young people as citizens; 6) 'institutional realm': children and young people as adults; 7) 'proactive realm': participation with vision.

This typology is quite different from the rest of the models. It gives voice to children to decide on matters that affect them in a much more direct way and helps distinguish between the different projects and what they actually offer to children (Francis & Lorenzo, 2002). Children and youth participation in city planning is becoming of more interest among policymakers, designers and researchers. This conclusion comes from a big body of research that suggests that urban environments are best planned with the direct participation of children and youth. It looks at the most current thinking and practice of participation as a communicative and visionary process (ibid.). It recognizes children and youth as more than young adults that must participate as adults rather it is an approach that attempts to empower children, youth and adults to re- invent childhood and the places that support it (ibid.).

This methodology is of great importance for the attempt it makes to integrate the best principles and practices from environmental design and environmental psychology in the making of children's environments. (Francis and Lorenzo, 2002) But what is not clarified is whether children's participation is looked at in an attempt to create a more democratic world or if it is simply a way to make better places for children. This is a dilemma to be addressed if

we strive towards positive environmental and community change (Francis and Lorenzo, 2002). Moreover, it is limited to projects and cannot be used for more informal cases of participation.

2.3.5 TYPE pyramid

The “Type pyramid” (Fig.4) is a typology that adds to the youth focused participation models by incorporating intergenerational connections and taking into account recent research development in youth- adult partnerships. The use of a pyramid is to schematically articulate different configurations of youth- adult control that reflect optimal participation types for youth empowerment. The TYPE Pyramid is presented with five types of participation that delineate various levels of youth- adult involvement: Vessel, Symbolic, Pluralistic, Independent and Autonomous. The concept of youth participation can be observed on a continuum.

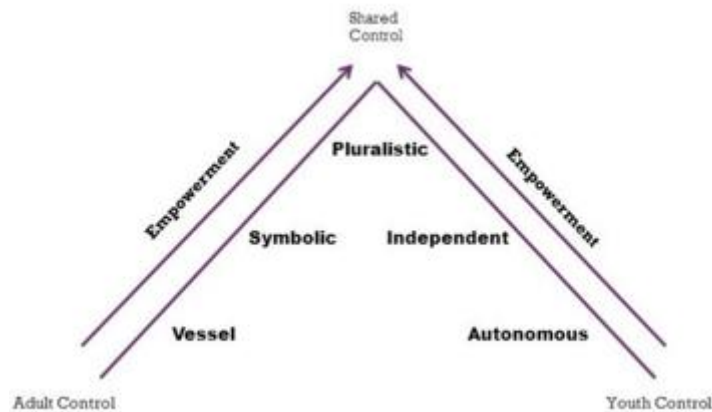


Figure 4: TYPE Pyramid
Source: Adapted from Wong et al, 2010

What makes the “Type pyramid” different to other frameworks are three characteristics: the use of an empowerment theoretical framework, emphasis on both youth and adult involvement and that the five participation types express the varying degrees of empowerment and positive development (Wong et al. 2010). It gives great importance to critical consciousness as a central part of the empowerment process. This concept borrows from pedagogical principles that were promoted first by the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. It focuses on co-learning with youth; adults can facilitate critical dialogue, awareness and building skills towards critical consciousness. It is the co-learning process that with adults that the youth can both become empowered to reach developmental benefits (Wong et al, 2011).

Even though TYPE is a model that depicts how participation types can be most useful at enhancing the strengths of young people and reveal where youth voices are valued, still it doesn’t adequately explain the potential for the various developmental stages among children and adolescents.

2.4 Limitations of child participation

Embracing the child-centered, child-enabling and child-empowering values that describe participation is one thing but putting these values into practice is the challenge (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2009). As can be seen from the models above as well as examining existing literature, some key challenges for consideration can be identified. The first to be examined is that of seeing children's capacities in regard to age and competence- limitations frequently discussed when concerned with child participation. Then it proceeds to raise awareness in ways adults perceive childhood. From this, two more issues come up, looking at participation from an adult lens that leads to the aspect of power. These are followed by frequent arguments regarding protection, responsibility, language and context.

Age, cognitive development and competence

A limitation that is at the very core of this study is that children are often discriminated on the base of age (Freeman, 2007; Therborn, 1996; Vandebroek and Bouverne-De Bie, 2006 in Reynaert et al, 2009). There is a common misunderstanding when it comes to age and cognitive maturity of children and their capability to participate. In contemporary society, children are valued through uniting the idea of level of development (seeing children as dependent and developing) and human dignity (seeing children as individuals with rights) (Lee, 2005).

As introduced by Piaget (1971) children go through four stages of cognitive development and in each have different understanding of themselves and the world around them. But this should not serve as a reason to limit children's participation rather participation should be in accordance with the characteristics of children's development (Padilla & Rivera-Holguín, 2015). It can be misguided to use simple developmental stages or age-related norms to determine what children are capable of, though it is important to be familiar with the most important sequences of development (Hart, 1992).

Jans (2004) finds that immaturity of children in a certain sense is a biological fact. At the same time it is emphasized that the meaning given to this immaturity is culturally determined and hence varies in function of place and time. Even though age plays a significant role in understanding abstract concepts such as equality and rights, still, researchers have found that age alone does not necessarily account for moral and social understanding and that more variables are also involved such as culture, healthy brain development, and gender (Covell et al, 2008).

Every child regardless of age can express what they like and don't like provided they are given appropriate support and adequate information and are allowed to express themselves in any way is meaningful to them – pictures, poems, drama, photographs, all children can participate in issues that are important to them. There actually are many areas where young children can demonstrate even superior competence than adults for example, in their capacity to acquire IT skills, use their imagination or learn new languages. In order to appreciate these competences in children, it is necessary that adults hear and understand what children are saying or doing without rejecting it simply because they are young (Lansdown, 2011). When

expressing themselves, as Alderson (2010) suggests: “that children’s competence does not involve a Piagetian step up to a new different stage of life, but exists on a continuum from birth, where young children gradually acquire the means to analyze, reason and express themselves”(p.95). It is important though to point out that children’s capability to form their views at any age or the need to listen to children and allow their participation-again regardless of age-should not be confused with the concept self-determination thus it must be made sure that they are protected at all times.

Understanding childhood

The meaning of this limitation concerns the awareness of adults interacting with children and how they see them. When using the term ‘child participation’ it is important to recognize that children are not a single group. Children differ in their personal circumstances (age, sex, ethnicity, culture, social and economic circumstances), in their interests and in their capacities something that doesn’t go according to age necessarily but depends on the child and its personality, environment and context (Kirby et al, 2003).

Still, there are many ways of seeing children without it necessarily being a right or wrong way. What is however necessary, is to be aware of one’s understanding of children in order to work accordingly. Welbourne (2012) declares that there is need for reflection on “seeing” children conceptually rather than practically. She explains that different situations such as one’s own experiences in childhood, experience of being with children as an adult- a parent, a professional may shape the way one thinks about children. The following are ways which children can be “seen” according to (James 1995 cited in Mantle et al, 2007:790) quoted in Welbourne (2012) and the last is by Reynaert et al (2009):

- The developing child: incomplete, lacking in status and competence, voice not to be taken (too) seriously. Reynaert et al (2009) adds these “incomplete children” undergo their status in a passive way.
- The tribal child: living in a conceptually different world from adults, separate from adults and having their own rules and agendas: part of an independent culture, worthy of study in its own right.
- The adult child: competent participant in a shared but adult- centered world: socially competent in ways comparable to adults
- The social child: children have different but not necessarily inferior competences from adults afford them the same status as adults.
- The child as a being: many scholars (e.g. King, 2007; Matthews & Limb, 1998; Miljeteig-Olssen, 1990; Wilcox & Naimark, 1991 as found in Reynaert et al, 2009) who consider children as social actors, as active agents and autonomous, independent human beings in constructing their lives in their own right regard this type as representing the rights perspective on childhood.

Several scholars have talked about childhood as a social construction that differs according to time and place (James & Prout, 2015; Welbourne, 2012; Malone & Hartung, 2010).These

different ways of seeing children come from the ambivalent reality of childhood. On the one hand children are vulnerable and in need of protection and on the other hand, they are increasingly encouraged to present themselves as autonomous individuals (Jans, 2004).

It is important that adults recognize that their perceptions of childhood undergo constant change. Many adults have a romanticized notion of innocence—a period free from responsibility or conflict, full of fantasy and play and that giving them more control over their lives is seen as an intrusion into this period, taking away their right to enjoy childhood (Lansdown, 2011). Her explanation to this is that Article 12 does not work as an obligation on children to participate but rather works as a right for children to do so and adds: “Children’s right to be heard, in fact, is critical to improving the nature and quality of the childhood they experience.”

Adult-centrism

A big issue that is worth taking into consideration is that models for participation and citizenship are very often developed from a perspective that often neglects the specificity for children and are actually designed for adults. Inevitably, they cannot involve children successfully because of a reluctance to change all these models to a child friendly way (Jans, 2004). It is expected of children to fit into adult ways of participating when what is needed is institutional and organizational change which facilitates children’s voices’ (Prout, 2002 in Malone & Hartung, 2010).

It is difficult when adults view a young person as insufficient rather than as resources, or show “adultism” which flows from the assumption that adults are better than young people and entitled to act upon them without their agreement because of their age (Checkoway, 2011). This adultism can cause young people to question their own legitimacy or “internalize the oppression” of adults and the limitations that they place upon them (ibid.).

But nowadays, the classic relation between children and adults is changing. A good example of this is given by Jans (2004) when she points out that there has been an evolution from institutionalized learning to learning processes making it an integral part of our everyday life at every age and in diverse domains.

An aspect related to adult-children relations is also that tension between parents and child rights (Lansdown 1995; Reynaert et al, 2009). But actually, as Lansdown (1995) clarifies that the conflict is between adult responsibility for the protection of the child and the child’s process to reach self-determination.

Power

A broader image of the above limitation is that of power. Children are marginalized in an adult-centered society experiencing unequal power relations with adults. The main complications do not arise from children’s inabilities or misperceptions, but from the positions ascribed to children (Malone & Hartung, 2010).

Gallagher (2008 in Malone & Hartung, 2010) points out that power dynamics in children’s participation are more complicated than is explicated, and that power isn’t something that children either possess or do not, but something that is fluid, dynamic,

negotiated and contextual. This is further explained by Foucault, whose states that power is not a possession, rather it is exercised through discourses and practices that are specific to particular institutional contexts. This means that power relations are rarely singular or unilateral, although individuals may experience different relations to power within any one context (Healy, 1998).

There are limits on the scope of children's participation because for example lack of change on projects of project's lack which mean that projects, particularly changes reconstituting how power is managed between children and adults. Adult resistance is often at the root of this issue. Adding to this is an ongoing lack of capacity among adults and children to promote and support children's participation, due to the wide range of skills and experience it requires (Malone & Hartung, 2010).

Protection vs participation

As seen above, children are regarded in an ambivalent way as vulnerable and autonomous at the same time. Children signal that they need protection and space for self-development at the same time (Van Gils, 1999 in Jans, 2004). However there is a tendency to cancel out this ambivalence by sometimes stressing unilateral control rather than autonomy, or vice versa. Learning how to deal with this ambivalence is the challenge (Jans, 2004). Lee (2005) calls it "conflict between love and equality". He explains that the conflict is between recognizing children as equals and self-possessed individuals with their own wishes and opinions, and at the same time as being strongly connected to, or even belonging to loving and caring adults. But one should not forget children's need for protection (Jans 2004). Children are understood as being more vulnerable than adults requiring protection and it is this need for protection which is used to justify the continued resistance to giving children more control over decision making in their lives (Lansdown, 1995).

It has been argued that if children are free to make decisions they will act in ways that will place them in risk and outside of adult protection (Lansdown, 2005). But in fact, by encouraging children to speak up it actually helps adults because the information that the children will share helps the adults protect them better (Lansdown, 1995). She explains it as a cycle; children are perceived as lacking competence to take responsibility for their own lives and therefore as vulnerable and in need of protection and because of which adults are invested with powers to act on their behalf. But it is exactly because children are denied the powers to make decisions or fully participate in them, that they are rendered more vulnerable to the authority of adults. However, it is important to point out though that the inherent vulnerability which is perceived in children is not an objective definition of their capacity, it is only partially drawn from the biological facts of childhood.

Rights and responsibilities

Another common argument when it comes to children's right to participation is the notion that children should be able to exercise responsibility before being granted with rights. To this, Lansdown (1995) argues that actually one of the most effective ways of encouraging children to accept responsibility is to first respect their rights. If they are given the chance to share

their ideas in a group and to have them taken seriously, then they will learn that others, too, have a right to be heard and must also be respected. She also continues by reminding that in the case of adults, rights don't depend on their exercise of responsibility.

Language and communication

One main challenge concerning children's participation is their language skills, which depend on age and maturity, among other things (Wilson and Powell 2001 in Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006). Christ (2011) differences in language between children of the same age can also depend on socio-economic status.

But this issue can be as limiting for adults that don't have adequate communication skills to speak with children. Misunderstandings and confusion might be the result when one speaks to a child as an adult. Communication is not, however, just the spoken word; it is also non-verbal like gestures, tone and facial expressions (Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006).

Context

Lansdown (2011) presents an argument that the very concept of child participation, which promotes the visibility and individual rights of a child, is a Western imposed principle and conflicts with the cultural commitment to the primacy of the family and community of different cultures. She continues to explain that it is actually the continued viability and strength of the family (e.g. Articles 5, 18, 21) that is central to the realization of children's rights. She also emphasizes on the strong concept of community, mutuality and responsibility within the human rights discourse (e.g. Article 29) but that the practice of listening to children and taking their views seriously is not sufficiently recognized in the culture of any society but nevertheless believes that the fact that people have been treated in a particular way in the past does not justify continuing to do so in the future.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this section the theories this research are based on will be presented. The first is about the social construct of reality that forces children to understand their oppressed reality as normal and internalize it. The theory that follows is Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of Oppressed that gives an insight on how important it is to develop critical thinking to overcome the cultural oppressions of our lives. Then, the theory of Theatre of the Oppressed of Augusto Boal who was inspired by Freire is explained and in this way makes the methodology more comprehensible. Last, empowerment theory which is central to both Pedagogy of the Oppressed and Theatre of the Oppressed is presented.

3.1 Social construction of reality

This theory will be used to show how normalized concepts in individuals limit change. It is difficult to involve young people when they do not see themselves as a group that can create change (Checkoway, 2011). It also presents how ideas such as vulnerability in childhood derive from historical attitudes and presumptions and are a social and political construct, not an inherent or inevitable consequence of childhood itself (Lansdown, 1995).

Social constructivism is a theory that looks at how individuals create knowledge, make sense of the world around them, and construct reality and a view of themselves and what they see, feel and believe to be real (Teater, 2014).

The thought around knowledge development was initiated by philosophers such as Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche and Karl Marx, and psychologists Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget and George Kelly but the basic theory was presented by Berger and Luckmann (1991) that aimed at answering the question of how subjective meaning becomes a social fact.

Teater (2014) points out the importance of the historical and cultural environment that has an influence on how an individual will interpret an experience and how this experience will shape the individual's reality. Through social interchange within a culture or subculture, knowledge and meaning are created and are influenced and sustained by the various institutions within that culture. The environment, culture and subculture of individuals therefore impacts how they view the world and process experiences. Individuals function and behave according to their beliefs and value systems and therefore interpret the world through this lens.

Berger and Luckmann (1991) explain how human 'knowledge' is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations and how sociology of knowledge is used to understand the process by which this is done. In other words, how sociology of knowledge is used to analyze the social construction of reality. They ask how notions on concepts like freedom- or childhood in our case- have come to be taken for granted without questioning them and how their 'reality' is maintained in society. It looks at the general ways that realities are taken as 'known' in human societies, the processes by which any body of knowledge comes to be socially established as reality. Berger and Luckmann (1991) strive to answer how subjective meanings become objective facts.

Society as objective reality

Berger and Luckmann (1991) emphasize that the relationship between man -the producer and the social world- his product is and remains a dialectical one. Externalization and objectifying are moments in a continuing dialectical process. They speak about institutions as historical and objective facts, confront the individual as undeniable facts having coercive power through the control mechanisms that are usually attached to the most important of them. They represent a mutual agreement of “doing things”. The objective reality of institutions is not diminished if the individual does not understand their purpose. They may come as incomprehensible or even oppressive but real none the less. There is a process of “habitualization” that brings an important psychological gain of narrowed choices. The social formations known as “knowledge” are transmitted to the new generations through the parents. In this way the objectivity of the world is increased; for the children, in their early phase of socialization it becomes the world- “this is how it’s done”. This is because at this phase, they are quite incapable of distinguishing between the objective of natural phenomena and the objectivity of social formations. The objectivity also ‘thickens’ even for the parents by the socialization of their children, because the objectivity experienced by the children would reflect back upon their own experience of this world. The next step is the division of roles: “*A society’s stock of knowledge is structured in terms of what is generally relevant and what is relevant only to specific role... the social distribution of knowledge is done in terms of general and role-specific relevance*”(p.77). In the case of this study, it is interesting to look at what a ‘role’ of a child is.

Society as subjective reality

The next phase is that of internalization, by which the objectivized social world is turn into consciousness in the course of socialization in childhood. The child takes on the significant others' roles and attitudes, that is, internalizes them creating an identity by making them his own. Essentially, this is the point at which the individual, having experienced the objectivated event(s) within the institutionalized social world, immediately interprets it and finds personal meaning. This is done in two socialization processes.

In the first, the child becomes a member of society. It is usually the most important one; the basic structure of all secondary socialization so firmly entrenched in consciousness than the worlds internalized in secondary socialization and is much less flexible. E.g. shame for nudity comes from primary socialization; adequate dress code depends on secondary. For example, in the internalization of norms there is a progression from, 'Mummy is angry with me now' to 'Mummy is angry with me whenever I spill the soup'. As additional significant others (father, grandmother, older sister, and so on) support the mother's negative attitude towards soup-spilling, the generality of the norm is subjectively extended. The decisive step comes when the child recognizes that everybody is against soup-spilling, and the norm is generalized to, 'One does not spill soup' - 'one' being himself as part of a generality that includes, in principle, all of society in so far as it is significant to the child.

Secondary socialization includes role-specific knowledge in the social division of labor. It is learned through training and specific rituals. It can be very complex and depends

on the complexity of division of labor in a society. It's any subsequent process that introduces an already socialized individual into new sectors of the objective world of his society presupposes a preceding process of primary socialization; Secondary socialization is any subsequent.

In the world of childhood there is confidence not only in the persons in charge of the socialization but in their definitions of the situation. According to Berger and Luckmann (1991) this could not be different at this stage in the development of consciousness. It remains the 'home world', however far one may travel from it in later life into regions where one does not feel at home at all. Primary socialization involves learning sequences that are socially defined. At age A the child should learn X, at age B he should learn Y, and so on. What is still defined as childhood in one society may be defined as well into adulthood in another. Berger and Luckman also speak of context. The social implications of childhood may vary greatly from one society to another - for instance, in terms of emotional qualities, moral accountability, or intellectual capacities. Contemporary western civilization tended to regard children as naturally 'innocent' and 'sweet'; other societies considered them 'by nature sinful and unclean'. There have been similar variations - in terms of children's availability, criminal responsibility, divine inspiration, and so on. Such variations in the social definition of childhood and its stages will obviously affect the learning program.

3.2 Pedagogy of the Oppressed

An alternative to the above can be sought in Freire's work. Freire (1970) argues that knowledge construction can be done in a more authentic way of generating meaning and social action. In his books *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1970) and *Education for critical consciousness* (1973), he speaks of the normalization of poverty and inequality and the internalization of oppression but suggests a pedagogy where oppressed reflect on their oppression which leads to the necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation. Freire's primary concern was with contradictions in the social world, and in the societies with which he had educational involvement; he identified two key opposing groups: the oppressors and the oppressed (Roberts, 2015). He provides an alternative ideology of integration with one's context rather than adaptation. Integration is a result from the capacity to adapt to reality adding critical capacity to make choices and to transform the reality. He argued that "knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Freire 1970 in Lilyea, 2015).

Sewpaul and Ntini (2015) refer to Freire (1970) when they speak of emancipation to free ourselves from historical, cultural and political domination; to connect with ourselves and with others; to continuously examine our common sense, taken for granted assumptions and the world around us and in this way to be liberated from the constraints of society (Sewpaul and Ntini, 2015).

Freire's theory is extensive and but can be summed up in the following four points presenting his strongest beliefs:

(1) Dialogue as not acting on but with each other

Freire (1970) states: “true change requires a courageous dialogue with the people”. This statement involves respect; not one person working on another rather working with another. Dialogue wasn’t just about deepening understanding – but was part of making a difference in the world. Dialogue in itself is a co-operative activity involving respect believing that through dialogue there can be exploration of the possibilities for laboratory practice.

(2) Banking concept of education

Learning is seen from a nontraditional approach that focused on mutual learning that recognized the impact of power differences within the educational system (Lilyea, 2015). He saw education liberated, built on the idea of posing problems rather than giving answers (Roberts, 2015). Freire uses a banking metaphor to suggest that students are seen as empty bank accounts, denied the opportunity to think for themselves where teachers make deposits something that stimulates oppressive attitudes and practices in society. Instead, he proposes a mutual approach to education where teacher and learner are co-creators of knowledge where education is achieved through lived experience

(3) Praxis as informed action

Praxis than enables an understanding of how external structural conditions contribute to oppression, people are able to accept or reject certain elements, reframe issues and articulate change (Freire, 1970 in Sewpaul, 2013). He argued for informed action to develop consciousness; a consciousness that empowers to transform reality.

(4) Critical consciousness

Critical consciousness is achieving an in depth understanding of the world and taking action against their oppression that are illuminated by that understanding. It is the ability to perceive social, political and economic oppression and to take action against the oppressive elements of society. It is more than just being conscious but also includes one’s identity, attitudes and beliefs. It is seen as an in depth understanding that results from the freedom from oppression. It taps upon the lack of awareness of the oppression.

Sewpaul (2013), inspired by Freire (1970, 1973) explains how critical awareness can contribute to developing alternative paradigms and radical change. Change is needed in socially constructed notions by turning them into empowerment, critical thinking and effective participation. Empowerment through consciousness-raising, contributes to liberation, heightened feelings of self-esteem, efficacy and control, and supports the view that people have the capacity to reflect and act.

There is a lot of discussion whether there can be critical thinking in children. Children begin to acquire critical thinking and the capability to process information and to distinguish alternatives at a very young age through their experiences with others (Bruner 1983; Vygotsky 1978 in Murphy et al, 2014) something that continues when the children go to

school. The extent to which they act according to these judgments varies according to cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional growth. What is also found though among other factors are a lack of opportunities to practice these skills in a safe and supportive space, inconsistency in instructions on critical thinking by caregivers and teachers and limitations in making alternative, reasoned judgments (Murphy et al, 2014). Daniel & Auriac (2011), quote Lipman's (Lipman et al, 1980; Lipman 2003) suggestion of a philosophy-based approach for fostering critical thinking in pupils. Lipman argues that a person doesn't become a critical thinker automatically because of entering adulthood nor does it occur through technique, repetition and memorization, but by means of praxis. Empowering critical thinking enables to enrich their personal experience by placing themselves within the limits of their culture, and reflect upon the elements of content in the academic program. It is a practice used to stimulate doubts, questions and self-correction in youngsters to improve the personal and social experience

In conclusion, Paulo Freire was a utopian thinker, dreaming not of a perfect world but a better world (Roberts and Freeman-Moir 2013 in Roberts, 2015). He believed in a Utopia that was to be sought through reflective and dialogical action but also continue to appreciate history and recognize how traditions, cultures, and ideas from the past have influenced the present (Roberts, 2015).

3.3 Theatre of the Oppressed

Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is a method that through artistic productions and promotion of social dialogue as well as concrete social actions strives to transform reality (Santos, 2016). TO is a learning process, not a spectacle, that fosters critical thinking following Paulo Freire's approach to liberatory education; an aesthetic education that promotes a transformative model of learning based on dialogue (Picher, 2007). Augusto Boal, influenced by the work of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, departs from the belief that dialogue is the common, healthy dynamic between all humans and that when dialogue becomes a monologue, oppression starts (Boal, 2000). It consists of participatory, improvisational, dramatic forms that critically examine power relationships. They explore how humans oppress each other in physical and psychological ways and empower participants for liberating themselves and others (Boal, 1995, 1998 in Saldaña, 2005).

Tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed

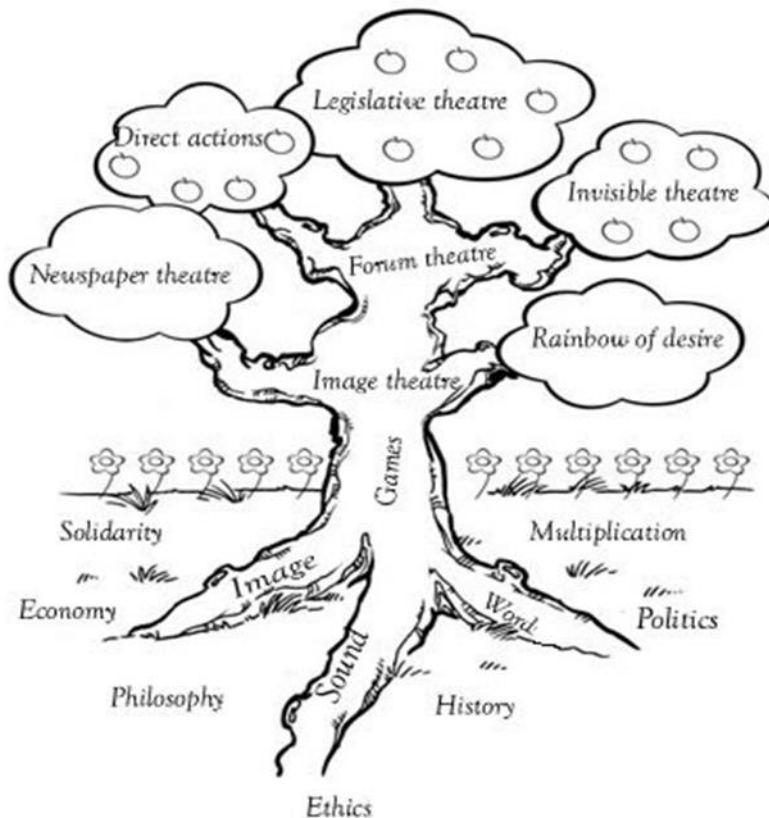


Figure 5: Tree of the Theatre of the Oppressed
Source: <http://theforumproject.org>

Boal's Tree of Theatre of the Oppressed (Fig.5) explains the progression of his theatre. The tree serves as a metaphor showing a representation of growth, fruitfulness, and expansion. All the parts are connected and feed off each other to create the powerful structure that is Theatre of the Oppressed (Osborn, 2010). The several methods used in TO overlap, interplay and are used together or separately depending on the goal of the theatrical event (Jackson, 1991 found in Boal, 2002).

Forum Theatre (FT) is the method used in this study. It is described by Boal (2000) as an interactive form of theatrical performance in which the public is invited to take part in the story that is presented on stage and to try out ideas for solutions or changes in a social or political conflict or a problem that is shown. The key lies in turning individual, subjective experiences into theatre and reflecting on them with the help of theatrical methods. It focuses first and foremost on (re)presenting, analyzing and changing power relations, from the point of view of people who are 'powerless' (Wrentschur & Moser, 2014). By raising awareness of the oppression people are led to liberation.

Boal founded his ideas on the belief that all theatre is necessarily political and reflects the ways society is organized and governed. Thus, theatre is a weapon, with two fundamental principles – "to help the spec-actor transform himself into a protagonist of the dramatic action

and rehearse alternatives for this situation so that he may then be able to extrapolate into his real life the actions he has rehearsed in the practice of theatre” (Boal, 1995, p. 40 in Rae, 2013).

FT is understood as an emancipatory process of consciousness raising; a process of problem solving. This process is both aesthetic and social that follows phases and steps (Fig.6) which result in the development of a Forum Theatre Play. Below, based on Hammond, 2015; Boal, 2002, 2000, the procedures are presented.

Phases and steps:

The “actors” have the opportunity-through developing skills-to come up with and perform their own play around a theme. The topics and concerns relevant for the actors are jointly expressed through artistic means. They go through a series of workshops that are carried out by a facilitator and each workshop uses games and activities (found mostly in Boal’s book *Games for actors and non-actors*, 2002) that serve different purposes in the process of reflection of the members of the group that is ongoing throughout the sessions.

In the beginning games that are effective at getting people to work together are used as warm ups and for the development of group dynamics. Getting in touch with one’s self is also very important in FT and the game playing is at the core allowing participants to stretch their imagination, de-mechanize habitual behaviors and deconstruct and analyze societal structures of power and the oppression in question.

Then the games and activities shift the focus to exploring the theme. Through the discussions around the theme a “word bank” is created and the actors are reminded of it and have the chance to reflect on it at the beginning of each session to keep consistency throughout the workshops. At this point “tableau” can be used. In tableau, the actors stop in freeze frame positions that relates to the group theme. They have time to notice the frozen images around them and then make choreography with the images in movement. This helps develop a theme that is shared and the scene can come out and the externalization process can start. By using images the actors express themselves without resort to spoken language. The frozen images can represent feelings, experiences or oppressions something that could be explained by the saying “a picture paints a thousand words”. Sometimes using words can confuse central issues and concepts rather than clarifying them. Images can be closer to true feelings or even subconscious feelings. Also, working with images rather than words can be more democratic as it does not privilege more verbally articulate people. Next, the games focus on developing the capacity to express ourselves through theatre. The above process leads to a scene. During the rehearsals, a technique called huddle is commonly used to support the actor group in responding to the audience’s suggestions by reflecting on what they think of the problem; a part of the externalization process.

The next step is the actual performance. The scene shows a problem in an unsolved form to which the audience is invited to suggest solutions. The problem is always the symptom of oppression and involves visible oppressors and oppressed. Ideally, both actors and spectators are suffering the oppression under consideration. After the scene has been shown once it is shown again and follows the same course until someone from the audience says ‘stop’ and takes the place of the protagonist to offer a suggestion as a solution to the

oppression. Regarding the audience, according to Boal (2002), as all human beings are actors-they act and spectators-they observe therefore are “spect-actors”. The objective of forum is to seek solutions to problems through dialogue. The spectators try to bring a different end to the play and the actors always keep its original end. Many different solutions are tried and the result is the extraction of knowledge, tactics and experience and at the same time ‘a rehearsal for reality.’

The facilitator here is called the Joker. S/he acts as a link between actors and spectators by providing commentary on the unfolding drama and inviting response and intervention and encourages the spectators to watch the scene closely and then asks the spectators to imagine what they would do differently from the protagonist to try to solve the problem of oppression. S/he encourages the audience to reflect and think further about their response, eliciting a variety of ideas and not settling for simple solutions reminding that there is no right or wrong. Then s/he accompanies them while they try out and make practical use of these, reflect results that have come out of the suggestions together with the actors and the audience and keeps records of what has been done. Most importantly, the process is structured again and again along the lines of the group’s wishes and interests, developing and applying relevant settings in which everyone can participate, or in which as many people as possible can be actively involved (Wrentschur & Moser, 2014).

The audience sometimes feels the need to replace the oppressor to bring a solution. But it is not a matter of reaching a desirable outcome but the stimulation of a cognitive process of being aware of one’s thinking. ”We cannot change the behavior of others but we can change our own behavior in ways that affect the others” (Hammond, 2015).

The decision of the audience is important. The people who form the audience depend on the setting. In the case of working with a special group or theme, the spectators can be specially invited and not necessarily from the setting. E.g. depending on the purpose of the play, social workers, police or other local authority representatives could be invited to either be informed about the issue presented or help by participating and giving a different perspective.

The process that starts in the actors and spectators is very important. The whole process shows how social reality impacts individuals and the unsuccessful struggle of people who fight for their concerns or rights. To this, they are provided with an opportunity to become actively involved in the performance and make suggestions to change the outcome of the story. By assuming the roles of those characters on stage that appear powerless, the new “actor” can explore alternative pathways and behaviors. The other actors stay in their roles and react to the change while maintaining the authenticity of their characters – the same as in real life. It can be seen as a “sociological experimentation” and can be understood as a collective brainstorming of ways of acting and changing stressful, oppressive situations or structures. The results of this may serve as impulses for many different forms of action, outside the ‘aesthetic space’. Because of the dynamic involvement of the audience, Forum Theatre becomes a tool of transformation by sharing strategies to move from oppression to liberation. The spectators acquire the power to imagine an alternative scenario and act it out through their intervention to change the original oppressive outcome. It represents a collective process of seeking realistic solutions to real problems. In other words, it is the theatre of

transformation, empowering passive spectators to become active performers in the rehearsal for change in their own lives (Boal 2000).

Before and after each performance there are discussions with the actors. The facilitator takes some time to reflect with the group on the topics worked on. This is necessary, in order for the workshops to work as a process, to keep track on what has been done and how the participants are getting on with their process of awareness raising and liberation as individuals and as a group.

Forum Theater is an ongoing process and the number of performances depends on the group. Continuing is what is called “direct action”. When the process comes to an end, the group goes through a de- role and evaluation session.

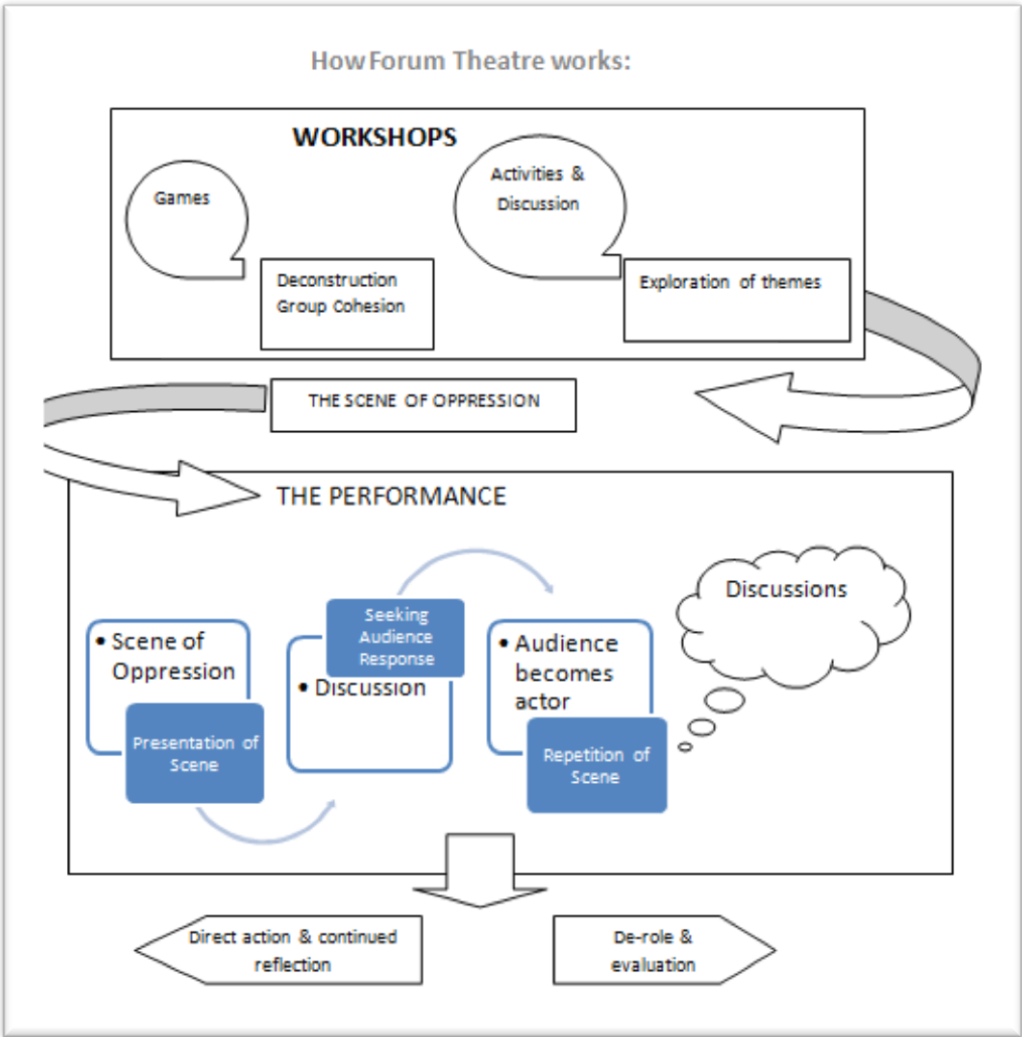


Figure 6: Steps and Phases of Forum Theatre
Author's illustration

Theories behind forum theatre

The process of Forum Theatre has several theories behind it that make sure that the work is safe and that the outcomes are optimized. Hammond (2015) presents the main theories in Forum Theatre as follows:

- Externalization: Turning the issue into something external to ourselves (White & Epston, 1990) and is the key process when children are creating their own plays. Addressing the problems directly could leave children feeling distress. But by allowing them to explore difficult themes through play, they are empowered to show their feelings through the characters in a safe space.
- Paradoxical theory of change: the feeling of discomfort before attempting transformation; meaningful change can only occur when we see where we are and where we want to go.
- Solution focused approach: drawing on the spectators strengths, various suggestions are tried to overcome the challenge.
- Embodied cognition: the idea that brain, body and environment are interconnected and that acting on our environment has an impact on the way we think (Shapiro, 2011)
- Personal construct psychology: providing a safe space to construct experiences of success that makes an individual views his world differently (Kelly, 1963)

Child friendly FT

There is not a lot of literature regarding studies with children using FT. Still as seen by Hammond, 2013; Rae, 2013; Saldaña, 2005; Day, 2002; Houston et al, 2001 and Saldaña, 1999 it can be used effectively. Most published materials on TO that are related to dramatic forms for social change report their applications with and impact on adults, adolescents but rarely has it been used with young children. This is surprising due to the potential to significantly increase empowerment in children given that Forum Theatre has been both influential and transformational in its original context. Forum Theatre as a pedagogical tool still remains largely unexplored (Hammond, 2013).

It is an approach that is flexible enough to engage children in developing effective behavior systems or emotional skills or making constructive contributions to their community and empowers them to take ownership at the same time they are given a voice to be heard by adults and can help to develop genuinely child- driven policies and practices for them (Hammond, 2015) .The process offers children a unique playful experience where they can develop creative problem solving strategies. When working with children, special attention should be put on deciding the scene with them and not for them (ibid.).

When exploring the theme, children can benefit from prompts, drawings or video examples that make the ideas more accessible to younger kids. Also the role of the facilitator is crucial. When managing the group, it is very much up to the facilitator that has to be skilled in group mediation especially with children to make sure that the performance is going the way the collective wants it to go and encourage the shy ones in the audience (Hammond, 2013). But again, the facilitator is not there to keep order, even if it gets loud, “but to start debate, highlight the grey areas that exist in real life situations and leave the audience as well as the group participants with sense of potentially useful and relevant solutions” (Hammond, 2015).

FT offers a holistic and child centered approach by which communities can be encouraged to identify potential solutions with stakeholders from local government and schools and effect change (Hammond 2015).

3.4 Empowerment theory

“The concept suggests both individual determination over one's own life and democratic participation in the life of one's community...Empowerment conveys both a psychological sense of personal control or influence and a concern with actual social influence, political power, and legal rights. It is a multilevel construct applicable to individual citizens as well as to organizations and neighborhoods; it suggests the study of people in context.”(Rappaport, 1987)

Teater (2014) provides four basic assumptions the first three of which are described by Lee (1996):

1. Oppression is a structurally based phenomenon that affects individuals and communities. It leads to many negative outcomes on individuals and communities one of which can be an increase in general hopelessness leading to self-doubt or false beliefs. Because discrimination and oppression are often embedded in the individual's cultural and societal norms, values, customs and structures, one must attempt to tackle both the environment and the self.
2. All individuals, groups and communities having strengths and resources to combat their problems, although their environment may be limiting. The goal is to acknowledge and foster the strengths of the individuals or community so they can overcome existing problems and combat the oppression and discrimination.
3. Empowerment involves focusing on individuals and their environment. If empowerment work aims to challenge the oppression from the environment that is negatively affecting individuals, then the work must target both the oppressed and the oppressor to truly create positive change.
4. Empowerment is a process and an outcome. The process of individuals, groups, or communities gaining power and control over their lives leads to an end goal of being empowered and having the necessary strengths, resources, power and control in order to grow and develop. This is achieved through social change and justice (Howe, 2009).

Teater (2014) points out that there is a distinction between theory and method when talking about empowerment. As a theory, it sees individuals as holders of power and control over their lives in the sense that they are in reach of the resources to cover their needs and rights and are free to develop. It predicts, explains or hypothesizes a behavior or a situation. The method of empowerment provides techniques, steps, or actions such as use of language and political advocacy, that can be used towards a goal of the individual being empowered and foster change. Zimmerman (2000) explains it in terms of process and outcome: the theory says that the actions or steps may be *empowering* and the outcomes are the *result* of being *empowered*.

The empowerment process is a collaborative process where the oppressed self-define their problems and actively engage in interventions to acknowledge and combat oppression (Lee, 1996 in Teater 2014). That is what this study aims to do; uses both an empowerment theory that sees children as holders of power but also apply an empowerment method where children are free to reflect and define their own oppression that is the start to their liberation process. As Teater (2014) states: “*Empowerment-based approaches are anti-oppressive in nature.*” Specifically in this study, the empowerment is done in the Forum Theatre group. According to Perkins and Zimmerman (1995), the basic components of empowerment are participating with others to achieve goals, help to gain access to resources and have a critical understanding of the sociopolitical environment.

4. Context of the study

Before presenting the methodology on which this study is based, it is important to set the context in which the theme child participation is being studied. Departing from the fact that children's rights including that of participation are recognized as fundamental all over the world regardless the context- something that is confirmed by the fact that almost all the countries have ratified the CRC with the exceptions of the USA and Somalia, still, there are different dimensions that should be taken into account that include, apart from legislation facts like the history, economics and traditional family structures.

4.1 Portugal's history and decolonization

Portugal is a country that has a rich history. Its empire since the 15th century was vast including territories like Brazil and several countries in Africa; Sao Tome, Angola, Guinea Bissau and Cabo Verde. But in 1974 with the 25th of April revolution, Portugal was declared a democracy which triggered the beginning of the decolonization of these territories. This resulted in the migration of almost half a million of people, the "retornados" who came to Portugal seeking a better life. By the end of 2003, 4% of the immigrants living in Portugal were from the largest communities like from Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea Bissau and Brazil. These people in the beginning lived in very poor neighborhoods as they were with less means and privileges (Reis, 1994). The children of the study belong to second and third generation of these families and come with this history behind them.

4.2 Families in Portugal

Another important dimension that should be taken into consideration when setting the context is the sociology of the family in Portugal.

Until the 1970s, Portugal was characterized by a political and legal model that represented the traditional image of the family where the Civil Code regulated the family and considered the man as the head of the family to whom the women and children owed respect and obedience. After the April revolution of 1974 and the publication of the new Constitution of the Portuguese republic (1976), a space was opened up for different representations of gender roles, now understood as more egalitarian as well as more democratized relationships between various family members (Torres et al, 2009). Since then, it seems that the male head of the family has been abandoned and both parents should have similar responsibilities in providing care for their children (Guerreiro & Pereira, 2007). But as seen in the work of Narvaz & Koller (2006) patriarchy is discussed as a normative discourse of family roles that leaves its mark on the family constitution even today, which leaves room for doubt as to how reality is to the ideal family structure.

What is also of interest is what Cunha (2005) discusses when looking into the function of children in the family. She describes four main dimensions: affective- "the joy of my life", expressive-"learning new things with children", instrumental- emotional and material

solidarity as well as “having someone that respects you and whom you can educate as you wish” and last, statutory- “to realize dreams the parents didn’t fulfil”. What she found is that even though there has been a change to the two first being the most evident dimensions in her study the two last ones, even though representing a more traditional family of the past are still evident. The results indicate, therefore the place of children in Portuguese society. And these instrumental and statutory values are the ones that structure and are more or less present in the representations of children and childhood today.

Last, another important fact can be taken into account when looking at children’s position in the Portuguese society is the position of young adults in this context. To what extent can children and young people be expected to be autonomous, independent and responsible, while their living situation also supposes dependency and inequality? (De Winter, 1997 found in Jans, 2004). According to Torres et al (2009), a significant percentage of people over the age of 30 are still living in the home of their family of origin and fewer live alone. The connection between this fact and how much children are taught and encouraged to take part in decisions concerning their lives could be a topic for future research.

4.3 Child poverty in Portugal

Portugal has one of the most unequal income distributions in Europe with poverty being quite high (Arnold & Rodriguez, 2015). The recession has led to a long-term gradual decline in both inequality and poverty due to the steep rise in unemployment and a decline in disposable incomes something that can also be attributed to Portugal’s low average educational attainments (ibid.). This with its turn has led to a rise in the number of poor households, with children and youths being particularly affected (ibid.). Child poverty has become an important issue in social and political agendas. In Portugal, almost 25 per cent of children are at risk of poverty and the most vulnerable age group (Bastos et al, 2010). Of those aged 17 and under, almost a third was below the 60% of median income poverty line in 2012 (Arnold & Rodriguez, 2015).

The consequences of living in poverty are significant for children and also for the society as a whole. Especially in children these consequences can be seen both in the short and the long run: in their physical and psychological development, their school outcomes and welfare, on their expectations for the future but also adults who lived in poverty when they were children, commonly have problems with self-esteem and confidence, civil participation, insertion in the labor market and professional qualifications (Bastos et al, 2010).

4.4 Portugal’s legislation regarding children

In Portugal, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was accepted in national law by Resolution Assembly of the Republic No. 20/90, of June 8, 1990, and Decree of President of the Republic No. 49/90 on the of 12 September (Mendes et al, 2014). When establishing the general principles of the regulation of parental responsibility, Portuguese law imposes upon parents a ‘positive duty to respect their children’, which translates into the duty to take

account of their opinion in important family matters, in accordance with their maturity, and the duty to gradually recognize their autonomy in leading their own lives (Art. 1878 No. 2 Portuguese CC).

When it comes to literature on the implementation of these rights, there is not so much available. Most literature focuses on children's right to being heard in a juridical hearing (Mendes et. al, 2014), their right to exercise their political rights (Sarmiento et al, 2007) or their right to education under the age of three (Vasconcelos, 2013). However, what could be of interest is that in the work of Vasconcelos, who makes 11 recommendations directed to the Ministry of Education, where she describes a need for a shift in support for children from zero to three years from being primarily care-based to primarily rights-based with an educational focus, her last recommendation is titled "Give a voice to our youngest citizens". She proceeds to explain the need to recognize the power of children to explore, discover, communicate, create and construct meaning and how essential it is to listen to these children and their diverse ways of expressing themselves. She stresses the need to recognize their right to speak and to have effective autonomy and participation in Portugal. Last, she pleads for finding more creative ways to ensure this right and interpret their attempts to express themselves, to respect their will and their need for autonomy and independent exploration. This implies that children may not be exercising their right to participation to the fullest.

5. Methodology

This chapter describes the overall methodology used in this study and provides a justification for the selection. Sample, data collection and analysis methods are explained and the ethical considerations as well as the limitations are taken into account.

5.1 Study design and justification

The research design of this study is exploratory using qualitative methods. As the purpose of this study is to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of the area of child participation, the use of an exploratory design is adequate (Stebbins 2001).

The method of this study is an experimental Forum Theatre (FT) project, through which children had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences of participation and express their views. Provided that children are given appropriate support and adequate information and are allowed to express themselves in any way is meaningful to them – pictures, poems, drama, photographs, all children can participate in issues that are important to them (Lansdown, 2011). In addition, ‘the best people to provide information on the child’s perspective, actions and attitudes are children themselves’ (Scott 2000: 99 in Malone & Hartung, 2010). With a focus on authentic and meaningful children’s participation in research, this led to action research projects carried out *with* children for social change (Malone & Hartung, 2010). According to Hammond (2013) one way of working creatively to elicit and advocate the voice of children and young people is through FT.

As seen earlier, the theory behind FT is that of participation, dialogue and empowerment. FT is an emancipatory method of research that combines processes such as gaining understanding and awareness rising with the search for change in one’s individual, social and political real life. The strategies that are suggested and tested can be then implemented in different contexts. In this way, it is in the tradition of emancipatory theories of education along the lines proposed by Paulo Freire (Wrentschur & Moser, 2014). Calsamiglia Madurga & Cubells Serra (2016) confirm FT’s potential as a research tool.

When talking about research with children, several authors (Shaw et al, 2011; Farrell, 2005; Wilkinson, 2001) point out the importance of including children in the process. They speak about their participation in research as a right–Article 12 of the CRC. As this study’s focus is exploring how children experience participation, the design had to “walk the talk” leading to the choice of a participatory tool, that of FT. FT met the needs of both offering the means to observe their perceptions as well as empower them to reflect on the matter. Another strong point of the study is looking at children as being capable in participating no matter age and cognitive maturity if the process, language or tool of doing so is child friendly. FT ticks many of the boxes of the limitations found in the literature review as well as covers ethical concerns such as not doing harm because of its subtle and flexible nature.

The connection is in the fundamental fact that in FT everyone has the right to speak, everyone has the right to question, and everyone has the right to be listened to (Houston et al, 2001). More specifically when justifying the use of this method:

- *FT can be adapted to age:* It is important to remember as noted by Hart (1992) that the capability of participation varies greatly according age, culture and to the individual characteristics of the child. In attempting to facilitate the participation of children who seem less competent than might be expected, one must identify situations which will maximize a child's opportunities to demonstrate her competence. Similarly, one should also use alternative techniques for enabling different children's voices to be heard.
- *The process of "Externalizing":* By taking ordinary life situations, FT helps individuals step outside their own reality and assess their condition clearer from a more distant standpoint (Nunes, 2014). This externalization process creates a safe space where concerns can be raised and approached indirectly.
- *Meaning of play for children:* Children are curious and express this curiosity by actively giving meaning to their environment. Children's ability to learn while doing so is impressive. The games children play to which they actively give meaning is a universal characteristic of children. According to Jans (2004) the realization of this is important for a children-sized concept of citizenship.
- *Tackling the limitation of language:* FT offers many alternative means of communication that can include children that are not so articulate (Hammond, 2015).
- *FT recognizes observation as an active form of participation:* In FT not all children will participate in the same way. Quieter children are actively participating through observation. In this way, children are allowed to decide if they want to exercise their right or not (Hammond, 2015).

However, this method requires training in order to be used. For that reason, when designing this study, the researcher contacted GTO- LX, a non-profit organization that has been practicing FT in Lisbon since 2005 for analyzing, discussing and exploring action strategies against common problems, leading to an increase in community awareness and citizen participation. After providing them with a proposal they agreed to take the project on. This assured that the results would be valid as the researcher had no previous experience with the tool. It was also through GTO- LX that the participants were reached (see below).

5.2 Sampling and study site

1) *Study population:*

Twelve children from a neighborhood of the eastern part of Cascais composed the main group of participants. The age range was 6-12, a range that may seem wide but was intentional. In accordance to one of the central point of this study which is to provide a different perspective of that categorizing child according to their age, age alone does not explain children's moral and social understanding and capabilities as seen in the literature review (Covell et al, 2008).

According to Hammond (2015), children of different ages can work together on a FT project as long as they are connected by the theme in question. During the performances, data was also collected from the audiences to whom the performances were presented who consisted of members of the wider community.

Regarding the group of “actors”, the participants of the study (Table 1), all the children belong to families of low socio-economic status that originate from African ex colonies of Portugal such as Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau. Even though these characteristics can be restrictive (see 5.6 Limitations of the study), nevertheless they were selected on the grounds of convenience and because, similar to the age factor as mentioned above, it is not an isolated indicator. Finally, a key criterion in the selection was not having participated in FT so as to eliminate the influence their prior involvement might have in the study.

As mentioned above, they were contacted through the NGO GTO-LX that had permission to run FT projects in that neighborhood. The procedure followed was that of contacting the NGO that provided the contact of the didactic play center, that in its turn asked the children who voluntarily signed up. To be able to participate they were given a letter of consent with the information regarding the study as well as the tool of FT, which they had to bring back within the week. There was no process of selection as 10 children were the ones that signed up and formed the group. The children in the audiences also had brought the letter of consent signed by their parent or guardian.

Table 1: Participants of the study

Girls	Age	Boys	Age
Maria	12	Eduardo	10
Susana	12	Alfonso	8
Nadia	10	Guillermo	7
Nuria	9		
Pinar	8		
Beatriz	8		
Ines	8		
Ana	7		
Sonia	6		

The names appearing in table 1 are fictitious considering the principle of anonymity

2) *Study site:*

The study site was the didactic play center that provided us with a big room with a mirror, isolated from the rest of the center. The workshops, performances as well as majority of the interviews were also conducted there taking advantage of the privacy offered.

5.3 Data collection

Observations and semi-structured interviews were the primary methods of data collection. The concepts observed were derived from the themes that came from the literature review and with this an observation sheet was drawn up to carefully evaluate the children's response to the theme in question as well as their views on their participation in everyday life practice. Descriptive field notes and journal reflections were kept to facilitate further analysis. After requesting permission, all the workshops and performances were video recorded that served for intense analysis of the rich data. The observations focused on the experiences of the workshops and performances and the interactions between the participants. The workshops lasted approximately 2 hours each and were done in three consecutive days during the Easter Holidays when the children were on vacations as one of the leisure activities offered by the didactic play center in the neighborhood. The performances took place the day after the last workshop and for the two weeks following Easter-in total 3 performances lasting between 1 and 1,5 hour each. Throughout the workshops, performances and interviews, there was constant reminder and reassurance that there is no right or wrong answer.

The observations were supplemented by 6 semi structured interviews that were audio-taped and transcribed. The interviews were conducted in a private room in the didactic play center. The children selected belonged to the quieter members of the group to give them a chance to express themselves and the questions were based on the themes that came up in the workshops and performances. During the interviews, some questions were skipped or phrased differently to reach the best child-friendly language for each of the interviewees. The interviews were short, ranging from 10-15 minutes each as the topics had already been addressed in the workshops and performances. The interviews were conducted in the week after that and last an evaluation session was held the week following. In total the whole project lasted a month.

According to Boal (2002) and Hammond (2015) a plan was made for each workshop which served several purposes: to create a safe environment, to establish group dynamics, to help them get in touch with themselves, to facilitate in the development of skills in the children needed to create a piece of FT as well as to help children start exploring and reflecting on the theme. This plan served as a guideline for the facilitator who used intuition when insisting on some games or activities more or less, according to the group's response. That is why the facilitators experience and skills are essential.

5.4 Data processing and analysis

Deductive content analysis was used for the analysis of the data. The analysis was based a priori categories that were developed on the basis of previous knowledge found in the literature review. For each of the research questions, an unconstrained categorization matrix was developed (Table 2 and Table 3)-partly from the literature review and partly from the data collected. The data was coded according to the categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). When the data used came from the language directly used from the children, in vivo coding was used to preserve the meaning given by the participants (Strauss, 1987), something essential when looking at children's views. An observation sheet was drawn up in accordance with the

categories mentioned. The analysis was done by repeatedly reading the field notes as well as careful re-consulting the video-recording and the transcriptions of the interviews which enabled comparisons to be made.

At this point, it should be explained that when analyzing the data and when providing direct quotes, the age is not mentioned. This is intentional as one of the points this study is trying to make is to avoid categorization of views according to age¹. However, the age of each child is presented in table 1.

Table 2: Categorization matrix 1

	As a right	Empowerment	Citizenship	Limitations
Children’s perceptions of participation	understanding the concept	information	rights vs responsibilities	age- understanding childhood
	areas of “matters affecting the child”	attitudes	understanding value of money	parents
		actions	understanding other people’s perspective	power
			Democratic processes	

Table 3: Categorization matrix 2

	Understanding participation	Concepts connected to effective participation	Children and adults
Effectiveness of child participation	memorizing	space	adult-initiated/facilitated project
	critical thinking	time	adults in the audience
		tools	children sharing their knowledge with adults

5.5 Ethical considerations

Ethics is a large part to consider when doing research especially when it comes to children (Farrell, 2005). When designing this study, several questions found in Wilkinson (2001) regarding the appropriateness of the children’s participation in the study were evaluated. The

¹ This is with regard to a child’s capability to express its views and does not apply when it comes to children’s protection as mentioned in 2.4 Limitations of participation.

questions were on the lines of if the research is necessary, why children should participate, if there is access, if the encouragement of participation be too disruptive and so on. In continuation of the last, ensuring that the work with children is in their best interest and does no harm (ibid.) was central as explained in the justification for choosing FT as mentioned above.

Informed consent is also very important and was seen to throughout the research process. The children were given information concerning the study before so they could reach an informed decision regarding if they wanted to participate or not, something that is a core element of this study. They knew what was expected from them and were also aware that they could change their minds and drop out at any time (Hammond, 2015; Shaw et al, 2011). Consent was reaffirmed regularly as suggested by Shaw et al, (2011).

Basic principles were followed as suggested by Oesterheld et al (1998) confidentiality and anonymity was assured at the beginning of the study as well as when interviewing. Before the start of each interview, each child was informed that their names would not be used. Regarding confidentiality, especially when asking permission to videotape, all children and parents were assured that the video would be used strictly for the research purposes and only people directly to this study would have access. They were also informed that the results would be made available to whoever would be interested.

5.6 Limitations of the study

The fact that the methodology and design of this study is quite original and innovative immediately entails that limitations will be present and inevitable. Careful consideration of these is required to overcome them as much as possible. Moreover, further research is required in order to prove this methods effectiveness (Hammond, 2013).

First and foremost, this study cannot be generalized as with all qualitative studies. Also, all the participants belong to the same socio-economic class and family background, aspects that are not at the focus of this study. The focus on the individual perspective of the children appears useful when studying their participation but a stronger focus on class and origin may entail a change in theoretical perspective. Further studies of these concepts' interrelatedness could help validate the argument of the effectiveness of FT when working the theme of participation with children. The findings on how different capacities and barriers for participation are affected by these aspects could help in further developing participatory settings for children something that would make the transfer from research results to practice easier (Grabowski, 2012).

The method itself encloses limitations similar to those found in focus group discussions. Hammond (2013) identifies it as a "group experience". Even though the relaxed and playful context was seen as positive when eliciting the children's views it was possible to get children's opinions without forcing by providing a group context that lead to children feeling more confident (ibid.). Still, there was always the risk that the opinions just reflected the dominant voices. That is why interviews were conducted on an individual level in the end to minimize this limitation by giving voice to the shy members of the group. Bion (2010) stresses the importance of taking the impact of group dynamics into consideration.

Time was also a considerable limitation. Having had more days for workshops may have presented a different outcome as well as the second performance had to be cut short due to the availability of the children but still got across what was necessary. As a general rule, FT's design is to be open-ended and an ongoing process (Hammond, 2013). That is why the conclusion of this study can only be if there is potential or not using this method.

Language was one of the smallest, nevertheless existent limitations. Due to the researcher's high understanding of Portuguese, the observation was carried out with no problems but when it came to interviewing the children, spoken Portuguese was an issue and for this reason a Portuguese and English speaker were present to facilitate when necessary.

Even though the limitations are many, they can be seen as challenges that can be overcome by thinking ahead and allowing the benefits to outweigh the difficulties.

6. Findings and discussions

This chapter presents the outcome of the data collection. It starts with a brief description of the procedures and then the themes that came up regarding each of the research questions is presented and discussed.

6.1 Descriptions of the procedures

The workshops which happened on three consecutive days and lasted approximately 2 hours each, were facilitated by the joker and consisted of games and activities to explore the theme of participation. These resulted in three performances that were presented to audiences in three separate weeks and lasted approximately 1,5 each. In the performances, the facilitator-now called joker-connected the group of “actors” to the audience facilitating the dialogue. Finally, the workshops and performances were then clarified by interviews that took place the week after the last performance. At the beginning of each workshop and performance, each member of the “actors” group signed a paper as a symbolic act to empower them of taking ownership of their participation in the project. A more detailed description of the workshops and performances can be found in the annex.

6.1.1 Workshops

Table 4: Workshop 1 "Who are we?"

Activity:	Purpose:
“My name is...and I came with...”	Name learning- Icebreaker
My name is and movement time	Name learning- cohesion
Zombie	Name learning - cohesion
Map game	Deconstructing social structure + identity-cohesion
Tableau: images of what is a child	Explore the topic
Discussion: What is a right and an opinion	Explore the topic
Video of children’s rights	Prompt to help understand the theme
1 2 3 Bradford	Develop theatrical skills and to use imagination
Mini Forum	Start reflecting on my thinking
What did we do today?	Recap-word bank
Kill the fly and snack	Closing game

(Boal, 2002; Hammond, 2015)

Firstly the children were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they were being recorded. The session started with warm up games as well as an activity that served for

de-constructing the social structure of their identity by placing themselves on an imaginary map according to where they were born, where their parents were born and where they felt more comfortable. Then they started exploring the themes by looking at what are concepts connected to children. Using the activity Tableau, they were asked to make frozen images of the concepts and then in groups of 3 add movement to their images and make a choreography that was presented in turn to the other groups. The most common actions were playing, crying and complaining. A discussion followed about rights. After being shown a video on children’s rights, they were able to mention which rights they had themselves (eg their right to food, protection, to play). One child mentioned a right to a phone and after being asked by the facilitator to explain, she gave the arguments she gives to convince her father. Some children agreed it was a right, others didn’t but in the end they all agreed that while having a phone was not a right but *negotiating* for one is. Then children went in turns giving an opinion. A group discussion continued about being able to give opinion in matters concerning them. The answers were that it was difficult to talk to parents about what they wanted. As the facilitator wanted to investigate how negotiating with parents was but without neither asking directly nor leading them, a mini forum theatre was the best way to continue. A game that helped understand the components of theatre followed and then they did the forum. The facilitator asked for a volunteer and demonstrated (roleplaying) a scene where a child is trying to listen to music and an adult is trying to interrupt so they could talk. The children took turns in getting the child to listen. The suggestions were: screaming, demanding, punishing and even hitting. The facilitator asked in the end what the children thought of these tactics and they replied that that is how things were; if a parent wanted something or didn’t allow something, it was no and that is how it is. The session ended with the children being asked if they wanted to share something regarding the session, thoughts or feelings, a reminder of what had been done during the day and finally with a closing game and a snack.

Table 5: Workshop 2 "My oppressions"

Activity:	Purpose:
360 circle	To reflect on the previous day
Ball game	Reminding names and concentration
Points on the floor game	Work on imagination and cooperation
Multiple of 5	Concentration and coordination
Activity: "What does a baby need to survive?"	Explore the topic
Discussion on what are my rights	Explore the topic
Using an example from one of the children make a story	Developing the scene
Reading Art 12 of the CRC	Prompt to help understand the theme
Adapting art 12 to the story	Developing the scene

Presentation of scenes	Developing the scene
Discussion	Reflecting on the theme
Mini Forum: “How do I make myself heard”	Developing and reflecting on the theme
Bantu and snack	Closing game

(Boal, 2002; Hammond, 2015)

The session started with reflecting on what had happened the previous day. Then several games followed to warm up, concentrate, cooperate and expand imagination. An activity followed about what a baby needs to survive. This was done to show what the baby’s rights are. They were then reminded talking about rights the previous day and the right to a phone came up again which triggered a child to share a story about getting angry with her father which resulted in her accidentally breaking her tablet and getting grounded 2 months for that. After asking her permission the story was used to start creating the scene. The children were divided in two groups and had to come up with what made her so angry to break the tablet. It is important to mention that at this point, seeing the story acted out starts the externalization process for the girl; the problem is not hers anymore; it belonged to the group. They acted out two scenes in which both groups show a scene where a “father” doesn’t allow the daughter to go out and play so she breaks the tablet something that she initially tries to hid but in the end gets punished. The scenes were followed by a reflection reminding the previous day’s discussion on punishment. The children were asked to reflect on the problem between the “father” and “daughter” and saw reason in both; the daughter was angry for not being allowed to go out and the father for having paid so much money for the tablet. They were then presented with a prompt, a text of article 12 of the CRC adapted to language that would be easier understood by the children: “Children have the right to think and express their opinion in decisions regarding their lives and parents have the responsibility to help them by giving information on the possible options and advising towards what could be good for them and what not.” They were then invited to apply the Article to their scene. How could they apply dialogue for the “father” and “daughter” to reach a middle ground? They presented again. What was interesting was that one group involves an “uncle” when trying to deal with the “father” and the other group, when showing the paper where Article 12 was written to defend their right to give their opinion and to be heard, the “parents” said: ”it’s just a piece of paper”. That started a discussion on why parents punish and if punishments are even necessary or the only way to correct behavior. They were also asked why they think parents would refer to Article 12 as “just a piece of paper” and they said that that was how parents were generally. A mini forum followed where almost all the children got the chance to try for a different solution instead of punishment e.g. apologizing, asking for a second chance etc. They then worked in their groups again and applied the ideas they used in the mini forum and finally came up with two scenes where they engaged in dialogue with the “parent”. These scenes were different from the previous ones where they ask permission to go out, are denied and break the tablet by adding a discussion after having broken the tablet where they apply what was proposed in the mini forum earlier. The session ended with a game and snack.

Table 6: Workshop 3 "Forming the performance"

Activity:	Purpose:
360 circle	Reflection on the previous day
Ball game	Concentration- cohesion
“Get into line according to...without talking”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperation • To become more confident • Basic theatrical skills
Talk to yourself in the mirror	
Information on dramaturgy	Develop basic theatric skills
Performing the scenes from yesterday	Reminder of the skeleton of the scenes
Discussion on punishment	Reflecting on the theme
Extensive preparation with tips from the facilitator on expression	Preparing the scenes
Last rehearsal and what will we wear	Preparing the scenes
Ball game and snack	Closing game

(Boal, 2002; Hammond, 2015)

The session starts with a reflection of the previous day. Games were played to work on concentration, cohesion, cooperation, developing confidence and basic theatric skills. They then performed the last scene they had come up with and acted out at the end of the previous day. A reflection followed on stating that both “father” and “daughter” in the scenes have a point. The discussion follows by questioning if punishment is in fact necessary and the children seemed keen to try out solutions through dialogue and e.g. advocating for a second chance. Also, they establish that when they would perform the next day to the audience, they should provide the information regarding Article 12 of the CRC to the audience so two girls volunteered to prepare a scene for that. The rest of the session was spent with tips on how a performance is presented, extensive preparation of the scenes with the facilitator’s advice on expression and noises. Finally they rehearsed and the scenes were like this: (A) the first scene was a news flash on Children’s day where Article 12 of the CRC would be read to the audience. (B) The second scene was a girl asking her “father” to go surfing. The “father” refuses, she asks why and he says there will be a lot of boys and then says he has a lot of work to do and sends her to her room. She gets angry and breaks the tablet. The “brother” enters the room and sees the mess. While she explains what happened they clean up. Then the “uncle” arrives. The children offer him a coffee and are very nice making him become suspicious that they are hiding something so the “brother” explains what has happened and the “uncle” recommends that the children talk to the “father” themselves instead of him telling. Then the “father” comes and the children hide behind the “uncle”. The “father” realizes that something is wrong. The “uncle” says that the children had something to tell and that he should listen to

them. Still the father gives a harsh punishment of two months without tv and surfing to which the girl reacts but gets sent to her room. (C) The third scene starts with the sisters and the “mum” and “aunt” driving in the car. The girls go to their room and then ask to go play something they are refused. They ask again this time asking for explanations and mentioning their right only to get the answer that “that is only a piece of paper”. They decide to go out anyway but get caught and punished.

The session ends with a reminder of theatrical components like speaking loud and not turning the back to the audience. They eat their snack.

6.1.2 Performances

Table 7: Performance 1

Scene:	Audience proposal:
A. Newsflash presenting Article 12 of CRC	
B. Breaking the tablet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try reduce the punishment (8years old) • Apologizing (15 years old) • Asking why such a harsh punishment (8years old)
C. “It’s just a piece of paper”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking why she couldn’t go out (9 years old)
Audience: Children from the didactic play center and residents of the neighborhood (approximately 25 people=3 babies, 15 children and 8 adults)	
Reflection	

After a final rehearsal, the children present the scenes as described above in the section workshop 3. Written consent was provided for participation and videotaping of the children in the audience which consisted of children of the didactic play center and babies, children and adults from the neighborhood.

The joker receives the audience and explains how FT works. She proceeded with some games to warm them up and the scenes were presented. After a clarification of what had been showed the joker invited the audience to participate.

The scene the audience identified the most with was second and three children went on stage to try and give a solution which were: trying to reduce the punishment of two months of no tv and surfing to no tv *or* surfing, saying “I’m sorry” and the last tried to reason with the “father” asking why such a harsh punishment. The audience acknowledged the difficulty they had getting parents to listen to them. Parents are those who decide making it difficult to share their opinion. The facilitator invited the audience to reflect on the question “how can we talk to parents?” and were reminded that the performance would be repeated two weeks later.

After the performance the children reflected with the facilitator. From the performance and the proposals of the audience, they identified different types of parents, some that that listen, are calm and don’t punish and others that are not very understanding. They mentioned that the “parents” in the scenes were not understanding but had a point because of having paid money for the tablet. The facilitator asks if that fact that parents pay money makes children lose their right to dialogue and the children answered that they didn’t lose their right but that

they should not lie. They proposed behaving and respecting parents in order to succeed in dialogue but that parent also had very little time for them because of working or cooking or watching football which led to some changes in the play. Finally they evaluated the play as having gone well even if they had been a bit nervous.

Table 8: Performance 2

Scene:	Audience proposal:
<p>A+B+C presented all together: The children read Article 12 of the CRC to the “father” who is watching football without paying much attention to them. He discards the Article 12 as being “just a piece of paper” which makes the children angry and results in their breaking of the tablet.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having done homework (10 years old) • “What can I do to convince you?” (10 years old) • “I will behave.” (12 years old) • Ask why (9 years old) • What do you want me to do? (10 years old)
<p>Audience: Approximately 20 children-6 to 12 years old-from a school in the neighborhood with 3 youth leaders</p>	
<p>Reflection</p>	

The audience for this performance consisted of children from a school of the neighborhood escorted by youth workers. They had given written consent on participation and being videotaped from both children and their parents when organizing the visit. Due to limited time from the behalf of the audience, the scenes were combined in one as well as including a few differences that came from the reflection after the first play.

The session starts with the clarification of what FT is and some warm up games for the audience. The scene is presented: A child reads the Article to the “father” and then when he is watching football, the children go to ask his permission to go out and play but the “father” refuses quickly while paying more attention to the match. The children try to negotiate by mentioning Article 12 but he answer when referring to Article 12 is that “it is just a paper”. In the end the children get angry and accidentally break the tablet. After clarifying what had been acted out the joker invited the audience to intervene.

The suggestions proposed were: a girl reasoning with the “father” saying she had done her homework and even cleaned and cooked and still was refused, another child asked: “What do you want me to do so you can allow me to go play?” and a boy in the end promised to behave for the rest of the school year. The audience stated in the reflections that parents didn’t usually justify why they didn’t allow some things, that they didn’t usually allow their children to take part in decision-making and that this would happen usually if homework was completed and that the aspects they could engage in dialogue with parents was going out to play and school matters. They finally pointed out that mothers tend to be more patient. The session ended with the joker inviting the group to reflect with their youth workers on the matter and that they would have the opportunity to be the audience to the play again on a later date.

In the reflection that followed the actor group acknowledged feeling nervous and shy presenting in front of an audience they didn’t know but that they were happy with the result.

Table 9: Performance 3

Scene:	Audience proposal:
A. A day in the classroom presenting Article 12 of the CRC	
B. Father watching football	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A child that is not the son or daughter try to help (16 years old) • Having done homework and cleaning (14 years old) • Look at me please- switch off the tv (social worker) • “Please think about it” (social worker)
C. Daughters angry response to her “mother’s” refusal to allow her to go play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Express feelings in way that encourages dialogue (social worker) • Ask why (9 years old)
Audience: Approximately 30 people: 15 children from the didactic play center and the neighborhood, 11 adults staff of the didactic play center and from the neighborhood as well as 4 social workers	
Reflection	

The audience was the same as the first performance but this time social workers were added in order to help demonstrate ways of expressing opinion in children to empower them.

The joker explained how FT works and played some warm up games with the audience. The scenes were presented: (A) the children sit down and the “teacher” talks about their right. The children agree to go home and talk about it with their parents; (B) The “father” is watching football and a girl asks to go play. The “father” refuses quickly while paying more attention to the match saying there were a lot of cars or that there were puddles and that the children would get dirty. The children said they would be careful and wear rain boots but were sent to their room. They advocate for their right as learned in school and the “father” answers that Article 12 was “just a piece of paper”; (C) the “mother” calls the children to see if they have done their homework, they say they have and ask if they can go surfing. The “mother” refuses because there would be many boys; they then said all their friends were going to which she answered that she was not the other children’s parents. They insist that they had done everything that is expected of them like homework and cleaning their room. After the final refusal the girls get angry and demonstrate their anger which results in punishment.

After clarifying what the audience has seen the proposals started. A teenage girl tried to help pretending to be a neighbor child justifying that she felt that parents listened to other children more than their own. Another girl tried by saying that she had done what was expected of her- homework and chores. Then the social workers tried by replacing the children in the scenes. Three propositions came that included: getting the parents attention, asking for the parent to consider their request and demonstrating a more effective way of expressing anger that would encourage dialogue instead of conflict.

Some important issues came up during the reflections. Children have rights but also responsibilities; parents don't listen because they are the ones that make the decisions because they know better; when younger children are not taken seriously because of playing with dolls but when they are older parents tend to be stricter.

In the reflection after, the actors group shared that this had been the best performance. They also expressed their desire to continue with the group so they could continue performing, be with their friends and share this information with more children.

6.1.3 Interviews

The interviews- as mentioned earlier- were conducted to clarify the basic concepts that came up in the workshops and performances. It was made clear throughout all six that the children had similar positions to the data already collected and that they had enjoyed the process thoroughly.

6.2 Children's perceptions of participation

In an attempt to answer the first question this study strives to answer, the researcher sought the concepts that have been presented in the literature to explore the children's experiences and views on their participation. As mentioned in the literature review, participation is a multilayered concept with the layers often overlapping. Still, the main findings discuss participation as a right, as empowerment, as citizenship and finally an overview of the limitations through the eyes of children. The coding used, as mentioned in the methodology chapter, is in vivo coding using the children's words.

a) "It's our right"

One of the most interesting parts of this study was to see how the children understood the concept "rights" before focusing on the right of participating. As this was something expected, the plan drawn up for the workshops included many activities to help in this process of understanding. They were asked to work in pairs and each pair had to give 3 rights of a child- what it needs to live and be happy. This way all children took part to the same extent and the danger of the oldest or loudest children speaking only was avoided. In the beginning all the pairs used words that described tangible objects such as milk, clothes, a dummy, a bottle, a bed, a shower. After asking them to think of more, they added objects like toys and heart. The facilitator asked what heart meant and Amelia said: "Children need love". When asking another group to clarify the right to a toy, they said: "Children have the right to play" (Ana). Then Eduardo mentioned the right to protection showing that they were starting to think in a more abstract way. Susana then said that children had a right to a phone. The facilitator asked her why and she started saying that it would be easier to communicate with her friends, that she could reach her parents whenever she needed to, that she could call them if she needed to be picked up from school etc. This was the perfect opportunity to explain to the group that even though the phone was not exactly a right rather a useful object or a prize,

still the process of negotiating for one or participating in the decision whether her parents would buy one for her or not, *was*. Having understood the right to participate as the right to negotiate, the children started expressing the areas which they considered as “matters affecting the child” as stated in Article 12 of the CRC. They identified three main “matters”: school, punishment and play. When asked to give an example of participating in school:

“If I don’t understand something, I put up my hand and the teacher allows me to ask a question and then explains it to me...” (Maria)

“Once, when some other kid was annoying me, I went to the teacher and told her and she listened to me” (Eduardo)

The main area in which they felt the right to participate was in decisions regarding play. This assumption came from the scenes that they came up with to express possible oppression. In the beginning actually, there was a little bit of a confusion between their right to participate and the actual right they hold to play. When negotiating with “parents” in the scenes, asking for permission to go out to the street or surfing, and were denied they said: “But this paper says we have the right to participate.” (Beatriz and Pinar) It was clear that they hadn’t fully understood the difference but nevertheless they exercising Article 12 at the same time by negotiating even though they were not fully aware of doing so. To help this in this, the facilitator gave them Article 12 printed which they had to incorporate in their scene and in this way make them conscious of using it.

The final finding which was of great importance was how they described the attitude of parents towards this right. When finally incorporating it, the answer of the “parent” in the scene with regard to Article 12 was “It’s just a paper”. This was something that clearly required more reflection. The facilitator asked in a discussion following this scene holding up Article 12: “Is this *just* a piece of paper?” A very big portion of the group said: “No, it is our right” confirming their understanding of the specific concept.

Discussion (a):

As seen in the literature, when working with children and encouraging their participation, a limitation often hidden behind is that of the ability children have to understand difficult concepts such as equality and rights. From the findings, it is evident that they initially understood the concept in a much more tangible way than abstract. If stopping there, it could easily been attributed to age or cognitive development stage. But by asking the right questions to encourage reflection their understanding grew. This is similar to Covell et al (2008) who say that children even as young as 3 years old do have the capacity to understand difficult concepts such as fairness, rights and responsibilities. They continue to explain that what children have problems with is demonstrating that capacity spontaneously. For that, they need an environment with an appropriate pedagogy where these concepts can be worked on. In this aspect, the workshops of the FT sessions proved to be beneficial in providing the space and trigger the start of critical reflection. From the description of the findings, it is evident that the

children went through some stages when processing the concept. This is of great importance and is to be understood by people working with children.

It is easily noticeable that the area most important to them was play. It is interesting because giving them the freedom to choose whatever they wanted, what both acting groups presented- without having received directions prior to their scenes- were scenes negotiating play in everyday life and after being punished. Play is at the core of being a child, the importance of which can be verified by Article 31 of the CRC:

“Every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.”

As has been already highlighted in the literature, play is regarded as an important form of human communication and a medium by which children are able to express, create, discover and rediscover themselves and their world “essential in the exploration and liberation of one’s self”(Hammond, 2015). While they are playing, children give meaning and shape their environment by actively intervening. Exactly because play is somehow without obligations, it is of such an importance to children. (Jans, 2004)

Still, the negotiation procedures regarding play and punishment were always set in the context of life at home. As already seen by Alderson (2010), participation begins in the less-observed private world of the family. Lansdown (2005) points out that the recognition of children’s right to participate necessitates a greater emphasis on being listened to, on negotiation, sharing of information and compromise within family life. The importance of this group identifying their oppression in the context of the family is significant because it is the first experience with standing up for one’s rights and may define how participating later on in life will go for them as well. Lansdown (2011) demonstrates this by giving a quote shared by Eleanor Roosevelt(1958): “Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home ... Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world” (p.81).

Of course the justification of the difficulty these children are facing does not come as a surprise given the context in which they are growing up. Lansdown (2005) points out that the tradition of involving children in decisions affecting them is quite uncommon in many parts of the world, especially in families belonging to low socio-economic levels of society as in this study. and by doing so the power and authority of parents is feared to be challenged. It is more common to have a hierarchical relationship where children are expected to obey, be quiet, accept and acquiesce to parental authority, do as they are told and not ask questions (ibid.).

Finally, not only is the family the ideal framework for the first participatory experiences for children, offering a preparation for child participation in the wider society but it will also foster early critical-analytic thinking through dialogue (Murphy et al 2014).

b) “I don’t even run anymore”

One of the main points this study focused on was empowerment. As seen from the literature, empowerment is both a state of mind and action. Zimmerman (2000) explains it in terms of process and outcome: the theory *says* that the actions or steps may be *empowering* and the outcomes are the *result* of being *empowered*.

Empowerment is directly connected to information. Empowerment as a state of mind was evident when looking at the children’s attitude. In the beginning, a lack of information was noticeable. A clear example of this came from the first scene two girls presented. When being refused going out to play by the “mother”, their tactic was to repeat the question again a little later only to be refused again, something that resulted in their frustration which was expressed by “breaking the tablet”, a clear demonstration of feeling powerless.

Apart from this scene, attitude was also something that confirmed a lack of empowerment:

“If I ask my mum to go play and she says no, it’s no ” (Nadia)

“If parents don’t allow you to do something or want something, that’s it, that’s that.” (Maria)

“Parents are those that are in charge/in command; they know what is best.” (girl from the audience of the 3rd performance)

“This is how it is; I don’t even run anymore” (boy in audience of 1st performance referring to avoiding punishment)

To tackle this, Article 12 was given to the children which was a straight forward sharing of information. They were asked to incorporate Article 12 in their scene which resulted in their change in attitude. For example the children started asking more “why” questions or started reasoning: “Why should I be punished for two months? Isn’t being without the tablet enough of a punishment?” (Beatriz).

When looking at their change in attitude, it was interesting to observe the shift in the way they acted when trying to negotiate punishment. As mentioned above, the frustration due to the lack of information resulted in “breaking the tablet”. In the scene, the “father” gives two months of no television and surfing as punishment. When asked what they would do, the first thing that came to their mind was avoiding it by hiding or lying about it. An easy assumption when seeing this would be to attribute this behavior to the devious nature of children wanting to avoid responsibility. But during the scene, while hiding the tablet, they shared the incident with their “uncle” which showed that they didn’t want to avoid taking responsibility but did not know how to face the “father” alone. By receiving Article 12 as information, their change in mindset and thus change in attitude which resulted in change in action: instead of avoiding punishment, dealing with it.

Discussion (b):

One main fact observed in the beginning of the workshops was the absence of the question “why”. When the girls ask their “mother” to play and she refuses, initially they do not ask for explanations but say nothing and go to their room. This can be explained as mentioned above, saying that children are usually not encouraged to ask question but to do as they are told (Lansdown, 2005). When taking into consideration child-rearing patterns that are commonly used in low-income families –as is the context of this study- it can be seen that obedience seems to have a higher value than autonomy (Hart, 1992). Parents see obedience as the means by which their children can succeed economically and this “reality” derives perhaps from the parents who themselves have little freedom in their daily lives - working in routinized jobs that demand obedience and efficiency (ibid.). Children in their turn, see examples in their daily lives which support what they are learning from their parents, what Berger and Luckmann (1991) call the process of internalizing oppression as an objective reality. The comment seen earlier from the “parents” in the scene referring to Article 12 of the CRC as “this is just a paper” is an example of this, as well as a forum that took place in the very first workshop where the children acted to be the “oppressed” adult trying to talk with the child who is listening to loud music. The tactics they used when trying to negotiate with the child as adults were: screaming, demanding, threats and even corporal punishment. When they were asked in the reflection that followed what they thought of the tactics, they said: “It is how it is.” In a reflection that took place later between the researcher and the facilitator, it was pointed out how well the children played the “oppressor”, how well they had internalized it as something normal and therefore did not react when receiving this kind of treatment.

In addition, as seen in the first two performances, when the children were asked when they had the right to participate, on several occasions the answer ways “If they had done their homework”, “If they had good grades”, “If they had done their chores”. It was clear that children felt bound by these responsibilities. What was needed was to liberate them from the idea that their lack of being heard had to do with their grades, if they did chores or in general to be liberated from the feeling of being insufficient and for that reason being denied participation.

But as seen above when information was shared with them-giving them Article 12-and they realized their rights, the question “why?” started appearing more, a clear sign of their empowerment. Breaking the chains of this construction of reality is not an easy task, nor can it be done in a few workshops or performances. But, the whole process that is started through FT, the action of participating in decisions and activities that are meaningful to them in settings with more opportunities for participation is more likely to lead to empowerment (Rappaport, 1987).

Still, when we look at empowerment as a process, it is clear that everything starts with a step. Confronting and acknowledging the influence of external systems on our thinking is the first step toward understanding and undoing oppression (Sewpaul & Ntini, 2015). Freire (1970) states that empowerment is giving information which leads to the development of critical consciousness. In this way children can see the world not as a static reality but a reality in transformation and understand that the oppression they are living is not their fault and thus are liberated. Empowerment starts from the change in mindset. The biggest evidence

and confirmation of the empowerment these children achieved was noticing the difference between the 18 times of repeating the same scene-including rehearsals and actual performances-showing the frustration of feeling powerless expressed by “breaking the tablet”; in the last presentation they don’t need to break the tablet anymore, they shift the focus from the result of the frustration to its prevention by replacing the action of breaking the tablet with addressing the father with a simple yet powerful request when negotiating: “look at me”.

The empowerment of the children was the desirable outcome. However, as described by Lee 1996 in Teater 2014, oppression is a structurally based phenomenon often embedded in the individuals cultural and societal norms, values and structures and thus is normalized, requiring a focus in the individual as well as their environment and at the same time. Steps are important but in order to reach effective child participation, it is not enough to empower children to change mindset but focus should be put also on the environment, including helping adults to change mindset to allow the children this space to put their mindset to practice.

c) “ Children have rights but also responsibilities”

During the workshops and performances, expressions of citizenship were noticed on many occasions.

Firstly, both in the second and third performance the statement: “Children have rights but also responsibilities” was heard. It was evident that both actor group and audiences had a clear understanding that with rights come responsibilities. This was noticed , when the children would try and negotiate with the “parents” regarding going out to play, they would use the fact that they had done their homework, were good students or completing the chores that were expected from them as the rationale to be allowed to go out.

Another indicator was noticed in the first reflective conversation considering whether punishment was required after the girl broke the tablet because of her frustration for not being allowed to go surfing. All the children answered that breaking the tablet should have consequences and that if they were the “father” they would punish her also. Moreover, the way the group reacted to the avoidance of punishment when having broken the tablet by hiding it or lying in the initial workshops demonstrated their understanding of values and norms to be followed: “It is not right to lie” (Alfonso) or in the third performance, in the final scene, a girl is not allowed to go out and she stomps her foot to her “mother” leading a girl in the audience to say: “It can be frustrating but we shouldn’t show disrespect.”

As a continuation of the above, it was impressive to see how they could take the “father’s” perspective by saying: “He paid a lot of money for the tablet, he must be angry” (Pinar). Moreover, their understanding of the value of money is another demonstration of citizenship agency.

Finally, the general observation of the flow of the activities as well as the group dynamics that were developed in the group show their ability to behave in a democratic way as there were no incidents like fights or disagreement rather there were the examples of Maria and Alfonso who on several occasions asked participants who seemed less concentrated to pay attention.

Discussion (c):

There is large debate as seen in the literature when evaluating if children can be seen as active citizens (Jans, 2004). One of the biggest arguments presented is children's ability of showing empathy and understanding another person's perspective, a quality that is paramount when expressing citizenship. Hart (1992) explains that this ability of taking the perspective of other people is at the core of truly participating. He points out that the 'perspective taking ability' begins when children are able to step outside themselves to take a self-reflective look at the interactions and to realize that other people can do the same thing. "If I were the father I would be angry and punish her too" (Ana, Nuria). In this phase they begin to understand that they and others are capable of doing things they may not want to do: "She broke the tablet because she was angry" (Beatriz, Alfonso and Pinar).

As for the children's understanding of the value of money, in the argument in favor of children being regarded as active citizens, Jans (2004) points out that children are effected by the same political, social and economic powers, something that the children of this study seem to be aware of. The fact that the children understood the value of money is also directly connected to the low socio-economic status of their families.

Citizenship as a form of participation is described in the literature as one of the elements that actually defines citizenship as presented by Delanty 2000 in Jans 2004. To this Jans (2004) adds that active citizenship today has become a learning process in itself for both children and adults, something the children advocated for throughout the workshops and performances; a shift from a 'command' family to a 'negotiation' family.

Finally with regard to the observation of the children using democratic processes when assigning roles in the performances or developing group cohesion and expressing cooperative group dynamics can be verified by Lansdown (2005) who confirms that learning that they will have their views taken seriously will lead to them understanding that other people's views must also be listened to and respected, giving children the opportunity to understand the reciprocal and mutual responsibilities that arise with rights. If we treat children with respect, they will learn to treat others with the same respect.

d) "Sometimes when I talk to my mum she covers her ears"

Throughout the workshops and performances, the biggest limitation presented by the children was the authority demonstrated by the parent. Five different children used the differentiation of "Good and bad parents" to distinguish those who listened and those who didn't, those who punished without explanation and those who gave reasons etc. Especially ineffective listening was something that came up as a limitation several times:

"When I want to go play and my mum is cooking, I wait for her to finish because she won't listen to me if not." (Nadia)

"Sometimes when I talk to my mum she covers her ears....she says I talk too much" (Sonia)

When asked to demonstrate how he would talk to his parent to get him or her to listen, Alfonso said: “Why don’t you listen to me? I know you are working but adults don’t even have one minute for children.”

Another limitation that was seen several times was ways children as irresponsible or not interested: “Children just play with dolls, they don’t think seriously of the world, I see my sister, she has no idea what is happening around her” (a teenager in the audience of the 3rd performance when trying to explain the difference between children and teenagers)

Discussion (d):

As seen from the literature, there has been extensive focus on the limitations of child participation. One of the main purposes of this study was to give voice to this group of children as well as the children that were in the audiences; an opportunity to see this issues and it’s limitations from a child’s perspective.

The limitations found were the ones “expected”, noted already by several scholars. These limitations are of paramount importance to the children and to their capacity of exercising this right. Power issues, the way children are seen, the space and time they are given to express their views were the most common as seen from the findings.

As seen above, the children had the capacity to take the perspective of the adults: “He paid a lot of money for the tablet, he must be angry” (Pinar) or “...I know you are working but adults don’t even have one minute for children.” (Alfonso) but still they know that it is not right. Even though there is proof from their attitude when discussing the tactics used by adults: “It is not nice but it is how it is” that they don’t agree, still this disagreement is not enough to provoke change as it is internalized. The danger of that is great as on the one hand there is great possibility that it will reflect on their lives as future adults and on the other hand they are bound to continue these patterns with their own children making the breaking of the cycle even more difficult (Lansdown, 2011).

Another limitation is described in the following statement: “Maybe parents are not aware of the right of the child to participate” (girl from the audience in the 3rd performance). This may be true, not so much as the knowledge of the right itself, rather not being aware of the impact small details, actions or comments have on children like: “look at me” (Alfonso) or “Sometimes when I talk to my mum she covers her ears...she says I talk too much” (Sonia). As already mentioned above, parents- especially of low socio- economic status- have a tendency to be more authoritarian evoking a bigger power imbalance between them and the children (Hart, 1992). This can also be attributed to a possible lack in parental skills. Lansdown (2005) lists some basic concerns usually expressed by adults such as fear of children becoming disrespectful, of putting them at risk, of burdening them with responsibilities instead of allowing them to enjoy the carefree nature of childhood or the concern of involving children is time consuming. Some of these were confirmed by the data: “Parents are just trying to protect us because they worry” (girl from the audience in the 2nd performance). Or “Adults don’t even have one minute for children” (Alfonso).

A clarification here is necessary. There is no doubt on the fact that parents love their children nor is the listing of the limitations intended to be a criticism. Instead, it is done to

bring to the attention of both parents and children the end result of these actions. However, this section focuses on the child's perspective and in order to understand this better is to remember that one of the basic principles of FT is that the audience doesn't replace the oppressor to bring a solution; the end point is not eradicating the problem but rather to learn how to deal with it through dialogue which is precisely the aim of this study: getting the message across to children that it is not their fault and to empower them to stand up for themselves; we cannot change the behavior of others but we can change our own behavior and in this way affect the outcome (Hammond, 2015).

Finally, the way children are seen by adults is an issue of great importance. The biggest impact is that children internalize these ways they are seen as something normal and real again through the process of making subjective meanings become objective facts as described by Berger and Luckmann (1991) and needs to be addressed.

6.3 Effective child participation

In an attempt to answer the second research question, this section will focus on a more overall view on the findings that could result in enhancing effective child participation.

a) Understanding the concept of participation

As explained extensively above, the children's understanding of the concept of rights was done through a process. Even when they were asked to incorporate Article 12 of the CRC in their scene, it was interesting to see that the next day they had memorized what the paper describing Article 12 said. Similarly, during the interviews, when asked what they remembered from the workshops and performances, Nadia and Sonia remembered word by word what their character said in the scene. This was a clear indicator of how these children learn and how they process knowledge.

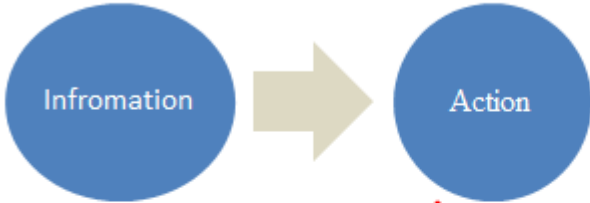
Discussion (a):

After an overall view of the data collected and paying close attention to the process the children went through during the workshops and performances, it was pointed out that children learn through memorizing, in a rather passive way something not at all effective. Even though this can be attributed to the general educational system which mostly relies on non-critical traditional methods, such as rote teaching (Print, 2007 in Covell et al, 2008), nevertheless, this finding gives a different perspective to the whole issue of effective child participation and makes one wonder which steps are expected to be followed when encouraging children to participate. Do we expect that by simply giving the information they will immediately turn that information into action? A response to this question is thus a possible reason for the "ineffectiveness" of child participation. The findings of this study strongly imply that a step in the equation is being skipped and that simply giving the information to children is not enough for them to act in a participatory way an illustration of which in order to better understand the idea described is provided below (Fig.7). Whilst they do learn, they are not fully understanding and valuing this right and the power that comes

with it. When teaching children about their right to participate and being heard, we expect a direct leap from knowledge to action. But when this “knowledge” is memorized or to put it in the terms used by Berger and Luckmann (1991), when it’s socially constructed thus taken for granted without questioning, it is impossible to have meaningful participation. The point should be to engage children in an education as active learners and not as participants of a passive experience in which they are simply expected to retain information imparted by knowledgeable adults but to be empowered to use their own context and experiences so they are enabled to take ownership of their learning (Freire, 1993 in Hammond 2015). This conclusion does not intend to give less importance to the step of sharing of information but to stress the importance of reassuring that the right is being fully understood and that the appropriate tools are also shared with them to use this information in action effectively.

With the realization of the value and the power of the right comes also the motivation for action which is essential in change. As seen in FT, the feeling of discomfort before attempting transformation is a central idea that is called “the paradoxical theory of change” by Beisser (1970), found in Hammond, 2015. It is this motivation that will lead to effective participation.

We need to go from this:



To this:

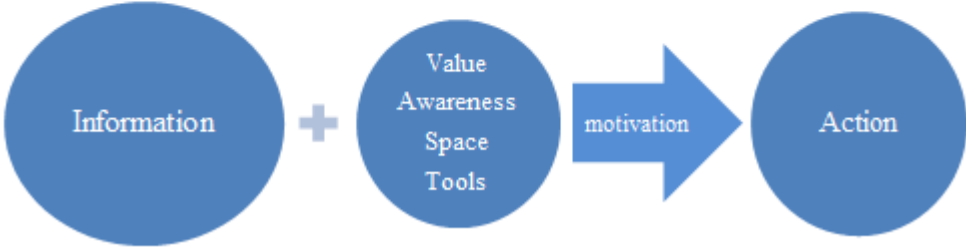


Figure 7: From Information to Action
 Author’s illustration

b) Space, time and tools

The importance of leaving space for children to explore the theme of participation was paramount. FT provided just that, a safe space where there was no judgment, where there was no right or wrong and where the children had the opportunity to try out ways of exercising their right to participate before doing it in “real life”. Moreover, space as well as time were needed when helping children reach the next step, that of becoming aware and valuing their

right. That is what was desired to achieve with this study. But it was also made clear that children require the space and time in their lives as well as the tools to be able to reach effective participation.

Discussion (b):

Child participation is not a matter of action- reaction but a process that is unique depending on each individual that requires space time and tools to be effective. This is why FT proves to be a perfect example of the “space” factor. As Boal explains, by acting out the alternatives that come up in the theatre, they serve as a rehearsal that may be extrapolated in real life (Boal, 1995, p. 40 in Rae, 2013). In this space, ways like dialogue, praxis and critical consciousness as seen by Freire (1970) are shared with the children. They have the opportunity to actually try out *how* to use these ways. But after becoming aware and giving value to this right, with the change in mindset comes the need for space exercise the right in real life. What is the point in giving children the information they need, as well as motivating them to use this information by truly valuing it if we are not going to give them the space to do it in their everyday lives? Again, doing this in real life will probably also be a process in which children need space and time in order to engage in. To turn this information into motivation and action children need the opportunity to do so.

c) Child participation and adults

Adults have played a significant role in this study. The project the children participated in was adult initiated and the facilitator was also an adult. An immediate assumption could be to question the findings of the study as also adult- centric and turn to the models and levels of participation presented in the literature review. However, this is not possible due to the difference in perspective the models and this study have.

On a similar note, adult involvement was not only present in the design or execution of the study but also adults were included in the audiences. Even though they didn't intervene in the scenes, they were made aware of the oppressions which the children presented and thus realize the impact their actions and behaviors have on children. This was confirmed by two conversations the researcher engaged in with two adults on two separate occasions. The first was with an adult who approached the researcher after the end of the first performance to say that he had never thought of giving the actual Article 12 of the CRC to the children to read and that he enjoyed that this was done during the performance. (The children had presented Article 12 through a “newsflash” which was the first scene of the performance.) He confirmed knowing about the existence of children's rights but admitted never having read the Articles involved but justified that fact by saying that he didn't have children yet. The conversation ended with the adult confessing that even if he did have children he probably wouldn't have read the rights anyway and concluded by saying that after this performance he would. The second conversation was after the end of the third performance where a father approached the researcher to share his appreciation while appearing clearly effected: “I had no idea they though this way.”

Discussion (c):

Adults played an important role in this study as they do when it comes to child participation in everyday life. Even though the project was adult initiated, the selection of the method of FT for the exploration of the theme was to make sure the perceptions of the children would not be contaminated by the researcher's and facilitator's perspective. For this reason, the researcher remained an observer throughout the workshops and performances and the facilitator was there to support the children in their reflection process. Her role was to encourage their critical thinking and use only what they brought up by themselves for further exploration. Throughout the workshops and performances she was constantly conscious of the need to keep aside her own thoughts-pre-constructed and product of reflection she was also going through with the children. This is paramount because if the facilitator doesn't do that, a form of paternalism is perpetuated with the facilitator taking responsibility for the participants which creates an atmosphere in which individual participants feel once again that they are not in control of their own lives. This hides danger: creating a sense of powerlessness or worse, no desire to take action outside of the workshops and performances (Spry, 2002). The most important thing was that the children owned the play; it was a product of their own reflections.

When considering the models presented in the literature review, it is important to point out that the perspective is different. Whereas there are many similarities like a focus on the collaboration between adults and children and it's positive outcomes as seen in Shier's "pathways to participation" (2001) and TYPE pyramid by Wong et al, (2011), as well as the importance of sharing power and doing child participation striving to empower children through substantial changes like mentioned in the "degrees of participation" by Treseder (1997) and Francis and Lorenzo's seven realms (2002), still it is impossible to place this project on any of these models. This is because the models focus on the adult's perspective and encourage their reflection on the ways they as adults work with children and share their power; this project is the other way around: the aim is to help children reflect on their experiences with adults.

Finally, when taking into consideration the adults in the audiences, as mentioned in the literature review when presenting the benefits of effective child participation, the advantages extended to adults as well. "An additional benefit of child participation is the increased adults' awareness of children's needs, opinions and wishes" (Kränzl-Nagl and Zartler, 2010). As seen when talking about children's empowerment on page 53, reaching effective participation for children is not only a matter of empowering them to change mindset and thus act but change needs to occur in their environment as well. Adding to the discussion above regarding space, it is the responsibility of adults to provide it and allow the exercise of the right to happen. As mentioned by Freire (1970), it is the co-learning between youth and adults that can facilitate critical dialogue, awareness and skills that lead to change. As Boal said, when dialogue becomes a monologue, oppression starts (Boal, (2000). This is something that as children adults need help with. Similarly to children, adults can also easily be related to the scheme (Fig.7 p.61). They might know that children a right to participate but lack awareness when it comes to the importance and value of this. Like children, they may also lack the ideas and skills-on both a theoretical and practical level-on *how* to give children

the space time and tools they need to do it. This could be tackled by educational workshops for professionals and adults that have children in their lives or “parent schools” for parents where adults also have the space and time to get the information, realize value, understand and find the practical ways of involving children more and allowing them to participate in decisions and matters concerning them. As mentioned above, adults have the responsibility to provide space, time and tools to children. Even though this study focuses on the child’s perspective and their empowerment it is important to recognize that children can transform adults to become what they need-as was seen by the adults who were in the audience of the FT performances. As mentioned in the literature review Lansdown (2011) point out that there are many areas where young children can demonstrate even superior competence than adults for example, in their capacity to acquire IT skills. It is very common that children share their knowledge with parents with computers, tablets or mobile phones and thus help them where they lack. Similarly, professionals like teachers and social workers can by assist children realize what they need from adults-in a co-learning experience with them of course-so that the children with their turn can help transform their parents in a similar way they share their IT knowledge.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

This study looked at child participation from a child's perspective and put light on some key issues that came up concerning child participation's effectiveness that can help to fill in the gap of the existing literature.

7.1 Basic findings

Firstly, regarding child participation as a right, children were able to understand the concept of rights as a whole as well as the specific right of participation. This happened through a process that was facilitated through several games and activities that aimed at encouraging critical thinking and reflection. This finding was similar to Covell et al (2008) who say that children even as young as 3 years old do have the capacity to understand difficult concepts such as rights but have problems with demonstrating this capacity spontaneously. Another interesting finding connected to the expression of participation as a right was that its exercise starts in the less-observed private world of the family where the children negotiated punishment and play.

This finding is of great significance because it points out an important fact: instead of waiting for children to grow up or reach the next developmental stage in order to express important matters to them and give due weight to what they are saying, it is adults who need to meet these children's needs. There is a need to break the boxes that are used to categorize children and to replace them by appropriate ways in collaborating with children that allows a wider range of ways of expression and provides them the freedom and space to select the way most appropriate to them.

The concept of empowerment was also visible through the children's attitude. Connecting empowerment to information, it was initially noticed that lack in information resulted in attitudes that showed deep internalization of oppressions in regard to participation. Also it was clear, when being asked when they could participate in decisions, their answers were when they can do them they had done their chores or if they were good students. It was necessary to liberate them from the notion that the ineffectiveness of their participation was their fault. But as their understanding and value for their right grew with the sharing of information-Article 12- so did their empowerment, something that was confirmed by the question why being asked more frequently. Actually their empowerment was seen evidently in the change in mindset the biggest evidence of which was the difference in the scenes they presented in the beginning and at the end of the project: the shift in focus from how to deal with the result of their oppression-being punished for "breaking the tablet" to how to avoid the "breaking of the tablet" altogether through dialogue. The question became: "what does it mean to break the tablet and how can I avoid it?"

Even though every change starts with a step and change in mindset is a very big step and evidence of empowerment, still, in order to use this empowerment to reach effective participation, their environment also has to change in mindset. It is one thing to talk about children realizing their power and having the space to do so and another thing to have the

space and tools to actually exercise this power, something that depends on adults that should also realize the children's power and providing this space and continuous education with tools on how to exercise it more effectively. Still, in this section, the focus is put on the child's perspective and helping them realize that if their environment is not fertile when it comes to their participation that it's not a matter of their ineffectiveness; it is not their fault. As a result of this children may be empowered to effect the transformation they need in their environment that will better allow their participation.

With regard to citizenship, the children demonstrated the capability of taking other people's perspective, understanding the value of money, the fact that they also have responsibilities and that they are also capable of working through democratic processes. What all these findings stress is the need to see and value children as people now. People that have views that should be listened to as they are significant contributions with regard to what children need. Childhood is not only a stage of preparation for future citizens. This is almost unfair on children; if they don't have the opportunity to exercise their right of participation effectively, if they are not encouraged to take responsibility and have opinion on matters that concern them, how do we expect that they do it once they reach 18 years of age and thus be responsible citizens then? We need to teach children to fight for their rights now so they can do it throughout their life.

Finally with regard to the limitations, the findings were similar to those found in the literature including seeing children as "developing" instead of "being", power issues with parents especially in the low socioeconomic context the study was carried out which in its turn affected greatly the participatory experiences of the children in their lives. These limitations were seen from the child's perspective. The point was to help children see these limitations as not their own but belonging to external factors.

Concerning the effectiveness of child participation, the findings of this study strongly imply that a step in reaching effective participation in children is being skipped. There is an assumption that by sharing information with children is enough to lead them to use it. What is missing is the opportunity to value this information and the motivation to use it. By skipping this step, children are participants of a passive experience in which they are simply expected to retain information imparted by knowledgeable adults instead of active learners taking ownership of their learning. It is a different thing to know something and a different thing to actually understand its impact and its importance.

However, it is a fact that we learn through socially constructing our reality. It is impossible to reflect constantly. The need for questioning and reflection is without doubt but this will lead to the construction of a new reality that in its turn will become mechanized. What about mechanizing respect for children? What about we reach a point where listening to children and giving due weight to their views will be treated as a given? Constructing a reality in which we function is inevitable. What is not inevitable though is the type of reality we construct.

Apart from the space needed for children to reflect and realize the value of their right, space is also needed to be able to express this right in real life. As seen when talking about children's empowerment (see page 53), after the realization of the power of their right comes the need for space and tools to exercise it on a regular basis.

Finally, even though this study focuses on the child's perspective, it should be acknowledged that adults have been a part of this study as they are a big part of the way towards effective child participation. The project was adult-initiated and the facilitator was also an adult but the researcher remained an observer throughout the project and the facilitator, through the principles of FT, was aware of the way to act. However, if we don't recognize participation as a question of power that needs to be recognised by adults, then we cannot talk about effective child participation. As seen from the findings and the conversations that took place with adults after the performances, this study could help adults becoming more aware of the children's wishes and needs and to realize the impact their actions and words have on children. If children are to be able to express their views, it is necessary for adults to create the opportunities for children to do so. In other words, Article 12 imposes an obligation on adults, in their capacity as parents, professionals and politicians, to ensure that children are enabled and encouraged to share their views and participate in the decisions made. For change to occur what is needed is the realization of the power or impact our actions or words have. We have seen that change starts with one step at a time. We have also seen that knowing doesn't mean necessarily doing. As in the case of children, adults also *know* that children should participate but they need to become *aware* of it more as well as learning *how* to help children do it. This can be done by taking off our "adult glasses" from time to time and reflect. Simple questions like "what is a child to me?" or "why am I not allowing this child to participate?", "is it in the child's best interest or is it simply a matter of lack of time?" are a good place to start.

This study was a good example of adults-the researcher and the facilitator-co-creating the knowledge the children have. In this way, children feel ownership for this knowledge and are motivated to use it. Providing the example of how children help adults in their lives because of being more competent when it comes to IT devices, similarly children can help transform adults and their environment by sharing their knowledge on effective participation.

7.2 Strong points and weaknesses of the study

This study gave children the opportunity to express their views but also gave due weight to these views. It not only captured children's perceptions of participation but also the *change* in these perceptions. This was done through FT, an emancipatory method of research that combines processes such as gaining understanding and awareness rising with the search for change in one's individual, social and political real life.

Factors like being able to adapt to age, recognizing the meaning of play for children, tackling the limitation of language and communications often used as an excuse in child participation but also addressing how participation is not an obligation but a right to be exercised or made FT the ideal tool for this study. It also covers ethical concerns such as not doing harm because of its subtle and flexible nature. Finally this study contributes to the very little amount of studies looking at the child's perspective.

The biggest weakness this study holds is the ethical dilemma of encouraging children to recognize their oppressions. It is a big risk to start a process of awareness-raising with children about matters that directly impact their lives. Helping them realize their oppressions,

as liberating as it is on a theoretical level, still, is not necessarily accompanied by a change in their environment leaving the danger of them feeling even more powerless than before. Therefore constant support is needed. However, FT's design is to be open-ended and an ongoing process, something that GTO-LX recognizes. After seeing the potential this project has, it was decided- together with the children- to keep the group going so as to provide support and continue with the work.

7.3 Theatre of the Oppressed and Social work

Theater of the oppressed has been discussed extensively throughout this study. Specifically the method of FT has been seen on two different levels; as an efficient research method as well as a powerful tool for intervention by empowering and raising awareness in children and adults.

On the one hand, even though FT appears to be of great potential when used in research, still it is not very common. However, the process of engaging the community, especially those who are marginalized, using art creates a powerful learning space. By combining the tools of art and academics, community building is promoted by combining the tools while opening the space to help the researcher connect with the oppressed. Additionally, as a result of using art to promote mutual learning, the qualitative research concept of "voice" is transformed from an academic ideal to a pragmatic lived experience (Lilyea, 2015).

On the other hand, social workers can learn a lot from Forum Theatre as it is an exemplar of the type of methods that are needed to make the re-focusing of services a reality (Houston, 2001). With social work changing from using a problem-solving approach to using strengths perspective, FT seems to be one of the tools social workers should be equipped with as it helps come closer to the lifeworld of disadvantaged communities. The participation of social workers in the audience of the third performance can be seen as an example of a partnership between professionals and vulnerable groups in the co-creating of knowledge. Adding to this, Houston (2001) explains the way that social workers can use FT as facilitators and coordinators of the process which would involve identifying key problems in partnership with families and social networks, selecting the appropriate group of actors, arranging for the delivery of the play, and being available for follow-up work and de-briefing should this be necessary. FT attempts to empower the dispossessed and socially excluded. In doing so, it presents the need for open dialogue and the attainment of consensus. As seen time and time again, Boal's techniques are communicable, accessible and transparent. It is important to remember that they were designed to engage indigenous populations throughout the world, many of whom are illiterate and socially marginalized. Indeed, social workers possessing a basic understanding of the skills and processes involved in social group work should have no difficulty in introducing the method.

After having pointed out the effectiveness of FT, nevertheless it is not the only method of TO that could be used in social work. As social work operates on different levels including legislation, it would be interesting to try the method of Legislative Theatre (LT) to connect collective ideas of citizens with policy makers. The objective of LT is to open up a dialogue between citizens and institutional entities where participants create bills that will address the

oppression they face (Boal, 2005). It is similar to FT however the subject of the production is based on a proposed law to be passed. Spect-actors may take the stage and express their opinions, thereby helping with the creation of new laws (ibid.). Using this method in social work, the gap between policy makers and citizens could become smaller.

Finally, as explained by Sewpaul and Ntini (2015), awareness represents an important step in getting people to act as engaged and responsible citizens who question, challenge, and confront the structural basis of social life. Social workers working with a strengths perspective approach can empower people to challenge the sociopolitical and cultural determinants that affect them. Sewpaul (2013) assumes that since ideology is socially, culturally, and politically constructed it could be possible by providing alternative learning experiences, there may be a disrupt in dominant thinking. It is essential for social workers to recognize the importance of *voices* being the object of theoretical and critical analysis so that we can engage in broader struggles of politics and change.

7.4 Recommendations

Before reaching the end, some areas for future studies are mentioned, some tools are provided for practitioners working with children and finally a recommendation is made on a policy level.

7.4.1 Recommendations for future studies

While carrying out this study, several aspects appeared that could be worth looking into in future research as listed below:

- To explore how socio-economic status, education of parents, occupation of parents grades of children and gender may explain effectiveness of child participation.
- To explore children's participation in children whose care has been provided by parents, grandparents, baby-sitters (with relevant degrees or not) or institutional child care centers (private or public).
- Exploring child participation by using Forum Theatre through the perspective of the adults in the audience.
- Exploring child participation using adults as the "actor's group".

7.4.2 Recommendations for practitioners working with children

Working with children is a very sensitive but rewarding area. This study sheds some light on different aspects of work with children that if taken into consideration could lead to more efficient outcomes. Being aware of one's own beliefs and learning processes as well as always questioning where a thought or belief comes from are essential qualities when working with children but in general practice as well.

Keeping the above in mind, every practitioner that works with children could benefit from this six-part guide on how to monitor and evaluate children's participation in programs, communities and in wider society by Lansdown & O'Kane (2014):

[Booklet 1: Introduction](#) provides an overview of children's participation, how the toolkit was created and a brief guide to monitoring and evaluation.

[Booklet 2: Measuring the creation of a participatory and respectful environment for children](#) provides a framework and practical tools to measure children's participation in their community and society.

[Booklet 3: How to measure the scope, quality and outcomes of children's participation](#) provides a conceptual framework for children's participation and introduces a series of benchmarks and tables to measure children's participation.

[Booklet 4: A 10-step guide to monitoring and evaluating children's participation](#) looks at involving children, young people and adults in the process. It includes guidance on identifying objectives and progress indicators, systematically collecting data, documenting activities and analysing findings.

[Booklet 5: Tools for monitoring and evaluating children's participation](#) provides a range of tools that you can use with children and young people, as well as other stakeholders.

[Booklet 6: Children and young people's experiences, advice and recommendations](#) has been produced by young people who were involved in piloting the toolkit. It consists of two separate guides: one for adults and **[a guide for children and young people](#)**.

7.4.3 Recommendations in policy making

Taking into account all the above, a recommendation for a change is made with regard to Article 12. After establishing that all children are capable of forming their views but the way of expressing depends on them -verbal or non-verbal like movement, dance, story-telling, role play, drawing, photography and so on- it is in the researchers opinion that age and maturity should not be mentioned in the Article as it re-enforces the notion that children are categorized and capable according to age. As explained several times throughout this study, it is necessary to clarify that the researcher doesn't imply that children are capable of self-determination, that they are not in need of protection or that all children are the same no matter age. What this study wants to convey is that age and cognitive development stages should not be seen as a limitation for children to participate, state their views and having this views be heard, rather adults should be able to reach the children and assist them in expressing these views in whatever way they want no matter age; it is not the responsibility of the child to reach the adequate age; it is the responsibility of the adult to create the opportunities for children to express them. Adults need to adapt to children, not children to adults.

It is in the researchers opinion that Article 12 does not reach the best interest of the child because of the vague message that comes across when saying "the child who is capable of forming his or her own views" as all children are capable just in different ways and also

“the views being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” strikes as limiting. The proposal is:

From: “States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”

To: “States Parties shall assure to all child the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child will be given due weight.”

In order for every child to be able to share his or her views no matter age, it is the duty of adults, especially professionals to participate in this by encouraging children and assisting them to express these views in every context-at home, school, health services, courts etc. thus the importance of the role of these professionals in each of these contexts should be recognized.

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Annex

Interview guide

(Language adapted depending on the child and depending on the answers there were many why questions to understand the thought process)

(Portuguese)

(English)

Esclarecimento do tema da participacao	Clarification the theme of participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lembras-te da historia do teatro? Qual era o tema central? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you remember the story of the theatre? What was the central theme?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ja sabias de isso? Se respondeste sim, onde ouviste falar? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you know about it before? If yes, from where?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideras isso importante? Porque? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you consider it important? Why?
Experiencia da participacao	Experience of participation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Podes dar-me um exemplo em que te deram atencao? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you give me an example of feeling heard?
Percepcoes da infancia	Perceptions on childhood
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • O que e uma crianca? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is a child?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Que palavras veem-te a cabeça quando se fala de criancas? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are things- actions related to children?
Os pais	Parents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Que tipos de pais existem? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of parents are there?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Que tipo de pais vimos na actuacao? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of parent was acted out in the performance?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Como expressamos os sentimentos com os nossos pais? (felicidade, amor, tristeza, raiva) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we express feelings to parents? (happiness, love, sadness, anger)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pode a raiva ser expressa aos pais? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can anger be expressed to parents?
Avaliacao geral do processo do Teatro Forum (oficinas de trabalho, desempenho)	General evaluation of the Forum Theatre process (workshops, performances)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qual foi a tua parte favorite? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which was your favorite part?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achas que alguma coisa podia ter sido melhorada? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think something could be done better?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achas que foi util? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think it was useful?

Observation sheet

Date:

Activity:

Area	Observations	Comments
Understanding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity on the theme 		
Expression <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings and words regarding participation • Feelings and words regarding childhood 		
Group dynamics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration between children 		
Attitude <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion • Equality • Autonomy • Body language 		
Empowerment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In making decisions about the activities • In the actual activities 		
Limitations of participation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age • Power issues • Rights vs responsibilities • Other 		
Overall evaluation		

Additional comments:

Workshops and performances

Workshop 1: “Who are we?”

When we arrived, the atmosphere was very happy. The children were there waiting for the workshop to start. These levels of excitement were maintained throughout the day. The session started with the researcher giving the information about the study and stated again that each child could choose to stop participating at any given time. The timeframe was stated that included three consecutive days of approximately 2hour workshops in the afternoons and a theatre performance on the fourth day. The children were reminded that they could drop out whenever they wanted as well as the fact that the sessions would be videotaped.

The first game was “My name is and I came with...”. The children seem a bit shy. In the second game, each child had to say their name and do a movement. Each child that followed had to repeat all the previous children’s names and movements. This developed into another game called zombie. The children took some moments to agree on how to act out the zombie. The person that was the zombie chased the other children. If a child got caught then he or she had to say the name and movement attached from the previous game of any fellow participant to be freed. It was clear that the children were enjoying this game thoroughly and were not shy anymore. The next game served the purpose of deconstructing the social structure of their identity. They were asked to create their own imaginary map on the floor (this activity is done using counties but because of the young age they did it with continents). The map was made up by them. The facilitator asked: “Where is Europe?” and they all ran to one corner of the room. She continued with each continent and the children each time picked a new spot on the floor. Then they were asked where they were born. All stayed in Europe as they were all born in Portugal. Then they were asked where their mother was born, then where their father was born and the children moved accordingly some staying in Europe and others in Africa. Last they were asked to go where they felt more comfortable, some stayed in Europe others went to Africa and some even went to Asia. They were reminded that there was no right or wrong answers.

The next step was to start exploring the theme. They were asked to think about 5 things that were “child things”. As the concept is quite vague for them, they were given time to think carefully before freezing in images with their bodies to express what they had come up with. (Tableau). The facilitator counted to three so they could present image 1 and shouted “freeze” and the children stayed in a position demonstrating actions related to children. While frozen they could look around them to see what everyone was doing. The same was done for image 2, 3, 4 and 5 in a sequence by clapping her hands. The next activity was to form groups of three where they had to combine their images, add movement and produce a choreography. They got 10 minutes to prepare it and rehearse before taking turns to present to the rest of the groups. From this activity, the concepts-images related to children were- starting from the most popular: play, cry, complain, eat, laugh, be strong, be small, be afraid, be a prisoner. Then they formed a circle and started a conversation about rights. They were asked what a right is and if they have any. They all answered that they had and that they had heard about

them on the news and newspaper. After that, a prompt was used to help them further understand the concept. They were showed a short video and then were asked what they had seen. They then discussed what they considered to be in their right and they mentioned their right to food, to protection, the right to play and a right to have a phone. The child was asked about the phone, why she considered it a right and she start giving arguments as she did to convince her father saying she wanted to communicate with other people etc. Some children agreed it was a right, others didn't but at the end the conclusion was that having a phone was not a right but *negotiating* for a phone is. Then children went in turns giving an opinion. A group discussion continued about being able to give opinion in matters concerning them. The answers were that it was difficult to talk to parents about what they wanted. As the facilitator wanted to investigate how negotiating with parents was but without neither asking directly nor leading them, a mini forum theatre was the best way to continue.

Before the forum, the children had to work on learning the basic components of theatre. A good game for that is "1- 2- 3 of Bradford". Children in pairs take turns counting to three:

A:1

B:2

A:3

B:1

A:2

B:3

When all the children could do it for a straight 30 seconds, they were asked to replace the counting with the movements they had come up with in Tableau. This was done gradually. First they replaced one then two and at the end three. Each pair showed to the others the movement that replaced the numbers.

The next step was a mini forum scene. The forum was presented. The facilitator asked for a volunteer and demonstrated (role-playing) a scene in which a child is trying to listen to music and an "adult" is trying to interrupt so they could talk. Then the children had to suggest ways of getting the child to listen. The ways were: screaming at the child, demanding he switches off the music, punishing and even hitting. After, a discussion followed and the facilitator asked if they considered these good tactics. The children all replied that they weren't but that it was how it was with parents; if a parent wanted something or didn't allow something, it was no and that is how it was.

The session ended with the children being asked if they wanted to share something regarding the session, thoughts or feelings, what they had done during that day and them playing a game "kill the fly" that enhances coordination and works on rhythm- another game related to enhancing theatre skills.

Workshop 2 "My oppressions"

The children were excited to receive us just like the previous day. The session started with a reminder of what they did the day before. Each child went in turn saying one activity or discussion they remembered. The warm up game began with the basic names games but varying the form. They had to say their name and throw the ball at someone until the ball had passed through the hands of everyone and was returned to the facilitator. The second form

was to say the name of the person who was receiving the ball. They had to maintain the order to which they threw the ball. The point of the game was to remember the order the ball had been thrown and not to drop it. As the game continued, more balls were added following the same order. This was a game to work on coordination and co-operation. The children found the game difficult but laughed the whole time and managed in the end to do it more with 3 balls. After that, they repeated “kill the fly” that they had played the previous day but added a fly so that two pairs would be clapping at the same time keeping the rhythm. They had to repeat several times to get it right and were very happy when they managed. The next game played was “point to the floor”. They had to have as many points on the floor according to the number the facilitator asked. For example if 40 points were asked for they would probably have to touch the floor with their hands too. She asked for specific numbers and they had to decide in the group how to do it by cooperating and using their imagination. Even though the children were participating in the games they didn’t seem concentrated enough so a concentration game was played next. They had to count without saying the numbers of multiples of 5 and instead say boom.

The children had calmed down so it was possible to start working on the theme again. They were asked to make pairs and pretend being a mother and father. They had to decide on 5 basic things each baby needs to live. They took 5’ for preparing and then each pair stood up in front of the rest and said what they came up with. The facilitator repeated: food, shower, love, milk, clothes, bottle, a bed, a dummy and added that the baby had a right to all these things. Then they were reminded that they had been discussing about children’s rights the previous day and so the children added the right to go to school, have books, play. The facilitator asked if any right was missing and if they all exercised these rights. They all confirmed having these rights covered and the phone came up again.

This triggered one child to share a story about having a tablet but after getting angry with her father had broken it and got grounded for two months. The facilitator asked if they could use her story for an activity. After the girl agreed, they were divided in two groups to come up with a story that would explain what led the girl to get so upset and break the tablet. At this stage it is important to point out that for the girl seeing her story acted out is what helps her externalize the problem and not see it as hers anymore. It now belonged to the group. They took 10’ to prepare and presented the stories in turns.

The first group acted a scene where the “brother” goes into the imaginary bedroom to find it messy and his “sister” upset. The “sister” confessed to having had a fight/discussion with her “father” because he didn’t let her go surfing and that while being angry she accidentally broke the tablet. The children try to avoid punishment by hiding the tablet. The “father” came in and the brother asks why his sister was not allowed to go surfing. The second group on similar lines acted out two children that weren’t allowed to go play so they got angry and broke the tablet but the scene wasn’t so clear.

Discussion followed to reflect on the scenes. The facilitator asked the children what they had seen and what the two had in common. They said: parents, tablet and punishment. The facilitator reminded them that they had been talking about punishment the previous day as well and asked if they found the punishment fair. The majority said no but it was interesting to hear that they also understood the “father” and would have punished her as well. They said that he must have been angry because he had paid a lot of money for the tablet and

what the girl had done was wrong but that she did it because she was angry. So two questions came up to help the children reflect: a) what could have been done differently instead of breaking the tablet? b) What could be done so that two people that were right in their own way could find a solution? Each child was asked in turns: One said she could have talked to the “father”. Another said she shouldn’t have broken the tablet because it wasn’t the tablet’s fault. Another said that it wasn’t on purpose; it had been because she was so angry. It was time for a prompt. Then the facilitator presented Article 12 of the CRC adapted and explained to their understanding. It said that children had the right to think and express their opinion in decisions regarding their lives and that the parents had the responsibility to help them by giving information on the possible options and advising towards what could be good for them and what not. After reading they were asked what the right was about and they all answered together “the right to express our opinion.” The next step in reflecting and connecting to the development of the play was that the two groups were given Article 12 in writing and had to adapt it to the scene they had previously presented. How could the story be different by giving their opinion to the adults? How should the girl and the “father” speak in order to reach a middle ground that would be different? They were reminded that it was *their* story. While preparing they took time to carefully read Article 12 again. The scenes were then presented:

The first group starts again with the “brother” entering the bedroom and his “sister” confessing she had broken the tablet after getting angry with her “father”. The “brother” entered and asked what happened. She said she broke the tablet because she was angry. They asked help from their “uncle” who called the father and told him. They cleaned up the room and the scene ended in a family hug. The second story this time was that that the two children go to their “parents” again and ask to go out but are refused. Instead of getting angry they start to negotiate by insisting that they wanted to play. The parents said that the conversation was over. Then the girls said that the paper with Article 12 says that they had a right to participate in the decision but the “parents” answered that it was just a paper. The girls then went out anyway and got punished for that.

A discussion followed. The facilitator said that they had two stories about the tablet but that they are two different stories. It was clear that the first story had not adapted Article 12 to it but that the second story included something interesting: “this is only a piece of paper” was the answer the “parents” had given in regard to Article 12. So she asked if it is *just* a piece of paper and they all said: “No, it’s our right” loudly. So the facilitator confirmed that it was a very important piece of paper. She then asked why the “parents” said that and a child said “because parents don’t give much importance to this”. The facilitator then said: “This is why we are here: What can we do so adults give importance and so we reach the family hug?” She then added “I am going to say what I saw: When children don’t follow the rules they are punished. Is this the only way to correct our behavior?” They all said no and eagerly put their hand up to say what else could be done. A discussion followed on punishment. They were asked what it was and the children gave examples like being without tv or other things they like most to do. When asked what the reason for this was they said that it was because parents get angry. The facilitator reminds them their right of being heard. She then asked what punishment the girl in the scene should receive and if in fact there should even be a punishment. Half the children said yes and the other no. As this theme seemed

complex and the children were speaking one on top of the other, a mini forum was acted out. Almost all children went in turns trying to talk to the father. The ideas acted out were: apologizing, asking for a second chance, promising not to do it again, saying that being without a tablet was enough of a punishment, another tried being affectionate. To these tries two more were added, that of talking back and that of blaming someone else for the breaking of the tablet, In the discussion that followed the children made it clear that those two were not correct showing their awareness of their responsibility not to lie as well as to respect their parents. For the last time they were asked to go back to their groups but they had to try again to talk to the father. Both stories were the same as before but added the children trying to apologize and ask for a second chance which they were granted and both stories end in a family hug. As always, the children said what they saw and reflected.

The session ended with a game (Bantu) where they double tapped on their chest and then clapped their fingers on the palm of their hand. In the clap part they took turns saying their names keeping the rhythm. Finally they snacked.

Workshop 3:

The session started again with what had been done and discussed the previous day. The facilitator pointed out that they had worked on the skeleton of their scenes. She then shared that in this session each group would be fully developing their scenes. They were asked to be concentrated as it was the only day they had before the performance the next day. They then played the ball game again that seemed to be going much better than the day before. The facilitator used this game to explain that they need to work together so that the ball doesn't drop as they will do with the theatre; they need to help their fellow companions if there is a need because this performance belongs to them all. The next activity was to make a line without talking. The line was depending on height then age and then they had to stand in alphabetical order according to their names. They found this exercise very difficult and could not avoid talking a little. They then worked on developing the basic skills for theatre. They were asked to form a line and walk but each child had to wait for the child in front of him or her to reach a certain point before starting. Afterwards, this game was enhanced by adding that they would stop at that point- that happened to be in front of a mirror and had to say something nice to their reflection. Examples were: I'm funny, I joke around, I am free, I'm beautiful. . The purpose of this activity was to help them feel confident. Finally some practical tips were shared like not turning their back on the audience and speaking nice and clear. It was then time to work on the scenes.

The children performed again. (A) A girl enters the stage and asks her "father" to go surfing which he refuses. She asks why not and he says that he doesn't have time and that the conversation is over. She gets angry, goes to her room and breaks the tablet accidentally. Then her "brother" enters and she tells him what happened so they decide to hide the tablet. The "uncle" then enters and the children tell him what happened and he calls the "father". The children get punished. (B) Two girls want to play go to their "parents" and ask them. They said no. They ask why and they say because no. then the girls say that the paper with Article 12 says that they have the right and the parents say that's just a paper. Then the girls start trying to convince, saying that they have done their studying and that they have organized

with friends, that there is a party. The “parents” still refuse, so they go out anyway, get caught and punished.

As always, a reflection followed. The children commented again that the “father” would be right to get angry because the tablet costs money as well as the fact that she shouldn’t hide the tablet. They again reflected on what punishment is as the day before and if it is necessary. This time they were all keen on finding a solution through dialogue and advocated for a second chance before getting punished. At this point, the facilitator asked if hitting was a punishment and they said that it wasn’t; it was violence.

They were then asked were they had heard about their rights before and they said from the newspaper, television and school on the day of the child. They were then asked to create one more scene that would present Article 12 to the audience for which two girls volunteered. The rest of the session was spent preparing and rehearsing. They were encouraged by the facilitator that worked with each group individually to make a story; put names, think where the uncle is from, where the father will enter from. She also gave advice on facial expression and noises.

The scenes were ready: (A) the first scene was a news flash on Children’s day where the Article 12 would be presented to the audience. (B) The second scene was the girl asking to go surfing. The “father” refuses, she asks why and he answers that there would be a lot of boys and says he had a lot of work and sends her to her room. She gets angry and breaks the tablet. The “brother” enters the room and sees the mess. While she explains what happened they clean up. Then the “uncle” arrives. The children offer him a coffee and are very nice making him become suspicious that they are hiding something so the “brother” explains what has happened and the “uncle” recommends that the children talk to the “father” themselves instead of him telling. Then the “father” comes and the children hide behind the “uncle”. The “father” realizes that something is wrong. The “uncle” says that the children had something to tell and that he should listen to them. Still the “father” gives a harsh punishment of two months without tv and surfing to which the girl reacts but gets sent to her room. (C) The third scene starts with the sisters and the “mum” and “aunt” driving in the car. The girls go to their room and then ask to go play something they are refused. They ask again this time asking for explanations and mentioning Article 12 which was written on the paper they were holding only to get the answer that “that is only a piece of paper”. They decide to go out anyway but get caught and punished.

The session ended with the facilitator repeating the tips of theatre: entering, going out, not talking at the same time, not having their back to the audience. They talked about clothes and how to do their hair. As always, they finished with a snack.

Performance 1:

The children were going to present their play to the rest of the children of the didactic play center and neighborhood the age of which varied from babies to adults. All the children and their parents had been informed about the study and being videotaped when being invited to participate in earlier days and had provided written consent.

The facilitator made a stage with paper tape on which they would perform. After the final rehearsal, they did a game to get them ready and excited; they all repeated Mazinga. They stayed in the bathroom while the audience entered.

The joker/facilitator received the audience and explained how FT worked. Some games followed to help the audience be interactive. They played the “contrary game” where she would say for example yes and they would answer no or high low etc. and then a rhythm game for concentration. The scenes were presented as explained in the last workshop.

The joker asked what the audience had seen. After the stories were made clear, a child said that children have it difficult doing things they want. Then another child said that she also had gotten 2 months punishment once and that it was a lot. The joker asked her what she could have done differently and she answered that she could have talked to him so was invited to take the girl’s position in the scenes and try. They re-play the last part where the girl is punished so tries to negotiate by trying to reduce the punishment like being banned only from surfing or only from tv. As we have seen from the literature, the oppressor is not replaced and the characters should maintain their intentions and motivations so the “father” still refused. Another girl tried this time by apologizing and tried to justify with the same result. Another child tried by asking for more explanations to why she is getting such a harsh punishment but the “father” didn’t seem to want to explain. The joker points out the question why. She asked if it is necessary to have punishment and if there is any other way. They insist that talking could help but that it is very difficult. The joker points out that they are trying to do is see *how* we can talk to parents. Do children have the right to talk to parents? A child said yes and was invited to go on the stage. She chose the second scene and tried by asking the “mother” why not and the “mother” said because no. A boy said that it is difficult to negotiate and that parents don’t listen. He used to run away to avoid punishment but now he doesn’t run anymore. He was invited to come on the stage but felt too shy. The audience continued the dialogue with the joker saying that the parents are those who decide at home and that the children don’t participate in the decisions. The joker asks if they give their opinion and the audience states that they don’t give their opinion to parents. The session ends with the joker giving some food for thought and stated that they would have a second chance to participate as the performance would be repeated two weeks later. She asked them to reflect on *how* they can talk to parents without breaking anything or running but trying through dialogue. She says:” If we run now we will run forever”.

After the performance a reflection that took place where the children expressed being very happy. The children identified that there were different types of parents: some that punish and others that don’t, some that explain and others that don’t, some that are calm and soft and others that are not very understanding. According to them, understanding parents listen and don’t punish. They identified the parents in the scenes as not understanding because they don’t listen but still justified the “father” from the scene because he had paid a lot of money for the tablet. The facilitator then asked if the parents pay money it means that children lose their right to dialogue. The child explained that they could use dialogue but not lie. But parents don’t listen and that is not correct. The facilitators asked how children can help parents change that aspect they answered they should not misbehave and respect their parents. Last they added that parents seem to only have 1 minute for children because they are usually busy working or cooking or watching football. That led to a few changes in the play.

Last they evaluated the play as having gone well but that they had been nervous and the facilitator reminded the importance of respect for our fellow actors by listening to them even when we are not on the stage but that for the first performance it had gone well.

Performance 2:

The audience is a group of children from a different school with ages between 6- 12. The children and parents had already been informed about the study and videotaping when arranging their participation and had given written consent. They were escorted by youth workers.

The joker receives the audience and clarifies that FT is different to conventional theatre where there is a play with a story that has an end, the audience claps and goes home but that in FT, mini scenes are presented to which the audience can propose suggestions through dialogue. She warms up the audience with the contrary game and a second game “forehead, nose” where she asks the audience to place their hand where she says even though she places her hand on different parts of the face or body, the audience had to do as she said, not as she did.

The children combine the three scenes due to limited time available from the audience. The scene is presented: The child reads the Article 12 to the “father”. Then when the “father” is watching football, the children go to him to ask permission to go out and play but the “father” refuses quickly while paying more attention to the match. The children try to negotiate by mentioning Article 12 written on the paper they were holding but he answers that “it is just a paper”. In the end the children get angry and accidentally break the tablet.

After clarifying what had happened, the joker asked if this happens in real life to which the audience said it did happen sometimes. Usually the parents don’t allow something but don’t explain and don’t allow the child to take part in the decision. A child justified by saying it was because parents are very protective and are worried about their children. The joker asked if worrying was wrong and the audience said that it was correct. The question “can children participate in decision concerning them” was stated and the audience said that they could only if they complete their homework. The suggestions then started. A girl steps in and says that she had done her homework but the “father” doesn’t allow her to go out. Then she insists that she has cleaned even cooked and washed the dishes...The “father” still says no and that this subject is closed. Another child tries: “What do I have to do to convince you?” The scene ends and the facilitator points out the question: How can you have dialogue about matters concerning your lives and in which aspects? They answered that school and play were the most common areas. When asked to clarify what they meant with school matters they said they shared only if it was good. It seemed that they didn’t fully understand the right to giving their opinion. Last, a boy tried by saying that he promised to behave until the end of the year. The performance concluded with the statement of the audience of there being a difference between parents with the mother usually being more patient. The audience was invited to reflect on the question of how they can engage in dialogue in matters concerning them with the youth monitors when back in their school and that they would have the chance to participate in again in presentations that would happen on a later date. The facilitator tried

something different with the group. They were divided in two groups. One would be the “parents” and the others children. Each had to think or proposition for the scenes. The “parents” (more than 12 kids) were very strict and didn’t want to allowed. The children were trying everything: expressed their feelings, saying how sorry they were, trying to behave better, that they would do all theirs chores before. Only one of the “parents” gave in, a girl and the boys complained that she was soft.

In the reflection, the actors group mentioned that it made them nervous to present in front of children they didn’t know but they were happy with the result. They stated they preferred presenting the scenes separately again and proceeded with making some changes like changing the newsflash for a scene at school, not including the broken tablet and adding an expression of anger.

Performance 3:

The audience this time is again children from the didactic play center as well as members of the broader community. But this time, social workers who were added in order to help by proposing suggestions that could empower the actor group as well as the audience watching.

The joker started by explaining how FT works and proceeds warming the audience up with the game of opposites and touching the body parts game as played in the last performance.

The scenes with the alterations made in the last reflection: (A) the children sit down and the “teacher” talks about their right. The children agree to go home and talk about it with their parents; (B) the “father” is watching football and a girl asks to go play. The “father” refuses quickly while paying more attention to the match saying there were a lot of cars, there are puddles. The children said they would be careful and wear rain boots but were sent to their room. They advocate for their right-Article 12- as written on the paper- as learned in school and the “father” answers “that it is just a piece of paper”; (C) the “mother” calls the children to see if they have done their homework, they say they have and ask if they can go surfing. The “mother” refuses because there will be many boys, they say all their friends are going, she says she is not their parents. They insist that they had done everything that is expected of them like homework and cleaning their room. After the final refusal the girls get angry and demonstrate it, resulting in punishment.

After clarifying what the audience had seen the joker asks on which right the scenes are based on. There is a bit of confusion if the right is the right to play or to give their opinion. When made clear, some children from the audience say that children have rights but also responsibilities. They also acknowledge that the scenes were something that happened often in real life as parents are the ones that call the shots and they know better. Some teenagers in the audience questioned if the parents were aware of this right. What can we do to help the parents be aware? A proposal comes up on the basis that sometimes it is easier if instead of the son or daughter another child goes and tries to talk to a parent saying that parents may listen to other children more than they do their own. The girl tries it out. The “father” says that the girls are busy and that it was ‘a matter between father and daughters’. A social worker comes in to replace the child. He tries by getting the “fathers” attention by asking him to look at him while talking and switch off the tv. Another proposal from a teenager was to convince

by doing homework and chores. Then another social worker replaces the child and proposes that the “father” thinks about it. The facilitator asks if that tactic worked in real life and the audiences said that it did sometimes but only if the parents were not angry.

In the second scene the audience notices that the “mother” is stricter and the daughter got angry. The facilitator asked if children can get angry with their parents and some children said yes others no. Again, a social worker came up to replace the child with a proposal and demonstrated how a more effective way of expressing anger that would encourage dialogue instead of conflict.

When ending, issues like which is the best age to be heard or negotiate with parents came up. The audience said that when younger, children are not taken seriously because they play with dolls and do not think seriously about life but when older, parents tend to be stricter.

In the reflection the actors group stated that this had been the best performance. They said that they enjoyed having adults participate this time and see them being in their shoes. They were asked what they wanted to do with the group and stated that they wanted to continue with their friends and the performances and found it important because of the information they could share with other children.

Letter of consent (adapted to English)

15th February, 2016
Research on child participation

Dear parent/Guardian,

(Name of didactic play center) will participate in the above mentioned. This research is part of a master thesis project conducted by Angela Markogiannaki, student of the European Master in Social Work with Families and Children (MFamily). MFamily coordinated by ISCTE- IUL in Lisbon.

For the purpose of this study, 3 two-hour Forum Theatre workshops will take place where the children will explore the theme “Child participation” through games and activities which will result in a play that will be presented 3 times in *(name of didactic play center)*. The workshops will take place during the Easter holidays, on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday from 4-6 pm. The first performance will be presented on Thursday of the same week and on the Thursdays of the two following weeks at 5pm. At the end of the workshops and performances, 6 children will be chosen randomly to be interviewed about their experience in the project. Interviews will length for 15-20 minutes and will be conducted in a private area of *(name of didactic play center)*

The workshops and performances will be videotaped and the interviews will be recorded, the material of which will be accessed only by the researcher and her supervisor, for the purpose of this study.

Confidentiality and informed consent are important elements for this research. Each participant will be informed before the workshops- performances-interview- of the research purpose and his/her right to withdraw. Participants will decide either to use their names or remain anonymous.

If you agree with your child to be considered as a potential participant for this study,

In the workshops.....
In the performances.....
In the interviews.....
or
In all the above.....

please sign this form and send it back by the **25th February, 2016**.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Name of child:

Name of Parent/Guardian:.....

Signature: Date:

Yours sincerely,

Didactic play center director:

(Attached to the letter of consent)

What is Forum Theatre?

A technique pioneered by Brazilian radical Augusto Boal. A play or scene, usually indicating some kind of oppression, is shown twice. During the replay, any member of the audience ('spect-actor') is allowed to shout 'Stop!', step forward and take the place of one of the oppressed characters, showing how they could change the situation to enable a different outcome. Several alternatives may be explored by different spect-actors. The other actors remain in character, improvising their responses. A facilitator (Joker) is necessary to enable communication between the players and the audience.

The strategy breaks through the barrier between performers and audience, putting them on an equal footing. It enables participants to try out courses of action which could be applicable to their everyday lives. Originally the technique was developed by Boal as a political tool for change (part of the *Theatre of the Oppressed*), but has been widely adapted for use in educational contexts.

For any questions:

(Phone number and email address of the researcher)

(Phone number and email address of the facilitator)