Repositório ISCTE-IUL

Choosing Classrooms: A Structured Interview on Children's Right to Participate

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Abstract

Discourses from distinct areas of knowledge converge on the relevance of listening to children's perspectives on their everyday lives and, specifically, in early childhood settings. Although children's participation is considered an important criterion to assess preschool settings' quality, there is little empirical evidence on children's ideas in these settings. This study aims to develop and pilot a structured interview to assess children's conceptions, expectations, and perceptions about participation. Results suggest children consider they have more opportunities to make choices in the classroom characterized by the participation narrative. Furthermore, the participation classroom is consistently described as the one in which children would feel better, have more fun, and like the most, suggesting children value more classrooms in which participation occurs.

Key-words: participation, children's ideas, interview, early childhood education and care

Choosing Classrooms: A Structured Interview on Children's Right to Participate

1.1 Children's right to participate

In recent years, the idea of children's right to participate has gained currency in scientific fields and more broadly in society. Specifically, there has been a growing recognition that children have the same right as adults to participate in all matters affecting them, in family, school, and community contexts (Lansdown, 2005). Broadly, children's participation consists of being active in the decisions that affect their lives, being able to express independent initiatives, and learning to take on responsibilities (e.g., Duncan, 2009), acting in partnership with adults. Participation can be exercised in different ways, describing a great variety of activities and taking place in various circumstances, assuming a multidimensional character (Sinclar, 2004; Stephenson, 2004).

Outside of academia, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) laid the legal framework that recognized children as holders of rights, including the right to participate. Articles 12 and 13 of this Convention are particularly important, as they delineate the right of all children to freely express their views, and the responsibility of the children's society to acknowledge and take those views into account (Auriat, Miljeteig, & Chawla, 2001).

When children are young, the activities in which they participate are generally influenced by adults' decisions and by the opportunities for participation that are offered to them (Bruder & Dunst, 2000). However, children's participation begins from the moment they are able to establish negotiations, and discover the extent to which their own voices influence the course of events in their lives (Hart, 1992). Based on this, Hart

proposed eight levels of child participation (i.e., from manipulation by adults, to decision-making initiated by children and shared with adults), noticing that the degree to which children should have a voice in anything is a subject of strong divergence. Nonetheless, the emergence of this conceptualization was determinant to the discussion about children's participation, and to the subsequent shift from endogenous (i.e., emerging from reflection on practice) to exogenous conceptual frameworks (i.e., encompassing contributions from political and social theory). Children's voices have become a representation of the commitment to the values of freedom, democracy, and care (James, 2007). Moreover, for Lundy (2007), it is the combination of voice and action that leads to genuine participation, inclusion, and belonging.

The view of children as competent and knowledgeable actors with their own valuable experiences, ideas, and choices highlights the importance of listening to children and young people. As part of listening, it is necessary to explore children's perceptions of their lives, their interests, priorities and concerns, in order to promote child well-being, learning, and development (Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001). This proposition is aligned with self-determination theory as it is focused on the basic psychological needs of competence and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Furthermore, research findings suggest that the more children experience opportunities to participate, the more they gradually develop perceptions of competence, in the most diverse domains (Harter, 1999). In addition, several authors discuss the potential impacts that children's participation can have on child development, self-esteem, self-efficacy, friendships, communication, negotiation, conflict resolution and decision-making skills (Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin, & Sinclair, 2003; Sinclair, 2004). There is evidence of benefits that extend beyond the early childhood education and care

(ECEC) setting: children who have come from settings focused on the promotion of child decision-making have higher achievement in language skills (e.g., Sylva, 1992).

This paper aims to study children's right to participate in ECEC settings by developing a measure to obtain data on children's ideas about participation and its implementation in ECEC settings. Through the design and piloting of a structured interview entitled "Choosing Classrooms: A Structured Interview on Children's Right to Participate", we aim to assess children's ideas about different types of experiences and opportunities to exercise influence within ECEC classrooms. More specifically, we aim to provide relevant information on children's conceptions (i.e., the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors children associate with participation experiences), expectations (i.e., how children's expect to feel, have fun, or learn, in classrooms characterized by different participation experiences), and perceptions (i.e., how children perceive their own classroom regarding participation practices and the activities and decisions they are able to perform there).

1.2 Children's participation and the quality of ECEC settings

Quality in early childhood education and care seems to be instrumental in ensuring positive developmental outcomes (e.g., Bryant, Zaslow, & Burchinal, 2010). Although the definition of quality is complex and may be analyzed from different perspectives (Bairrão, 1998; Katz, 1998; Tobin, 2005), it is agreed upon that children's rights constitute a key aspect in the framework of education and educational quality (Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001). An early childhood setting constitutes a democratic forum in which participants learn to understand each other's perspectives, values, and histories. Listening to children's ideas contributes to the establishment of respectful and educational relationships which enhance adults' understanding of

children's priorities, interests, feelings, and concerns. This understanding leads to changing assumptions and raising new expectations for both children and adults about children's capabilities (Pascal & Bertram, 2009).

Different curricula and pedagogical guidelines, while containing specificities, should capture children's interests and needs, fostering their development based on their experiences, knowledge and ideas, and interconnecting participation and pedagogical processes (Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010). ECEC teachers develop and implement their pedagogical practice based on curriculum guidelines, values, and objectives stated by different educational programs, learning theories, and research on ECEC quality, as well as their inner beliefs about participation (Pramling Samuelsson, Sheridan, & Williams, 2006).

Early childhood education is considered a fundamental microsystem for preschool-aged children, consisting of the environment and the people who contribute to an individual's experience of participation (Bronfenbrenner, 1999). Its quality plays a determinant role in children's cognitive and socioemotional development (e.g., Anders et al., 2013; Burchinal, Howes, & Kontos, 2002). At the microsystem level, a number of different pedagogical models, rooted in socio-constructivist approaches, use participation as a means to promote child development (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007). Research has indicated that high-quality pedagogical settings are those in which children's rights have been incorporated into both teacher education and practical work (Lansdown, 1996). The assessment of ECEC settings' quality should take into account the perspectives of different stakeholders, which necessarily means including children voices (Katz, 1998). Otherwise, essential information on how children experience quality within diverse ECEC settings, as well as a global understanding of pedagogical

quality will be lost (Sheridan, 2007). In fact interaction, communication, and participation describe high-quality pedagogical practices (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2006).

The positive relationship between children's participation and the quality of ECEC settings (i.e., characterized by positive social relationships and developmentally appropriate activities) has been documented. Specifically, children attending high-quality ECEC settings report more opportunities to participate and to exert influence on their own situation. They also report being able to express their thoughts and views, and having their opinions respected and considered (Sheridan, 2007). Likewise, children in high-quality ECEC classrooms tend to express to a larger extent that they believe teachers know what they like to do and give them responsibility to do what they like to do, based on both teacher flexibility and willingness to negotiate rules (Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001). Therefore, it can be assumed that children in these settings can better describe their participation experiences and perspectives about participation.

1.3 Children's ideas about participation

There are convergent discourses from distinct areas of knowledge on the relevance of listening to children's perspectives regarding their everyday lives starting in early childhood settings (Clark & Moss, 2005). According to Nutbrown and Clough (2009), any study aiming to include children's perspectives must consider issues of 'voice' as central and find ways of listening to young children in order to take their views into account. Therefore, it seems pertinent to assess children's ideas about participation. Ideas can be studied within sociocultural perspectives focused on beliefs. They can be defined as psychological mechanisms, built on experience, that drive

people towards action (Siegel, 1985). Ideas are molar constructs, encompassing thoughts, theories, or perceptions. Because ideas comprise knowledge about the present and the future, they refer not only to views and perceptions, but also to expectations, being related to information or evidence of some kind (Siegel, McGillicuddy-Delisi, & Goodnow, 1992).

Pedagogical experiences take place in a variety of permeable contexts that together contribute to the development of each persons' views of the world, their perceptions of their own competencies, and recognition of opportunities to make choices (Malafaia, Teixeira, Neves, & Menezes, 2016). Early childhood education research has documented children's capacity to develop and express their ideas, perspectives, and points of view about various issues which mattered to them in different social contexts (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). More specifically, children's perceptions were sensitive to the features of educational settings (Oliveira-Formosinho & Lino, 2008). The extent to which teachers support and promote children's participation was a key factor in children forming their perceptions (Emilson & Folkesson, 2006; Smith, 2002). Research suggests that from a child's perspective, it is vital for the child to participate in decision-making and to exert influence on their ECEC settings. However, they attributed different meanings to the concept 'decide' depending on who is making the decision and in which context it is made. Further, children considered their opportunities to participate in ECEC settings limited, except for their own activities and play (Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001). Research also suggests children experience equal participation in decision-making if the situation is characterized by reciprocity, turn-taking, and involvement (Sheridan, 2007).

From both the perspective of developmental psychology and pedagogy, children should be able to understand the educational situations they are placed in. Simultaneously, adults have the responsibility to create an environment that considers children's ideas and facilitates their participation (Doverborg & Pramling, 1993). Therefore, teachers' strategies and children's experiences of participation do not stand alone but, instead, shape and impact each other (Sheridan, 2007).

Different levels of participation seem to involve to some extent diverse degrees of power sharing between adults and children (e.g., Sinclair, 2004). Previous research has investigated ECEC teachers' conceptions of children's participation. Findings suggested participation has often been described as allowing children to choose activities, but rarely as giving children opportunities to organize and implement activities for their peers, with or without teachers' intervention. In a few cases, children's participation has been described as possibly harmful to daily pedagogic routines (Leinonen, Brotherus, & Venninen, 2014). Interestingly, other findings have suggested teachers consider participation could simply be promoted by giving children a sense of coherence and comprehension of the world. In this case, self-determination and management of everyday life were considered strong indicators for high participation and were related to positive definitions of wellbeing, involvement, belonging, interaction, communication and activity, at different ecological levels (Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010).

In order to plan and prepare their work, ECEC teachers should know how children think including the actual contents of these thoughts. Conducting interviews with children may be a good way to ensure that teaching and learning begin at the child's developmental level. Some studies have already focused on children's experiences and perspectives regarding participation in ECEC settings (e.g., Oliveira-Formosinho &

Araújo, 2004; Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001). In the ECEC literature there are

two ways to assess child participation: interviews (e.g., Bae, 2004) and observation of

interactions. Interviews primarily assess children's perspective on decision-making,

how they conceive their opportunities to decide, and how they decide to exercise power.

Classroom interaction observation analyzes communicational features that influence

children's opportunities to participate. More recently, a study by Sandseter and Seland

(2016), assessed 4 to 6 year-old children's experiences of subjective wellbeing and

opportunities for participation. Findings showed that the opportunity to influence where

to move, what to do and with whom, was crucial for children's well-being in ECEC

institutions. However, the number of studies on children's ideas about their experiences

in exercising influence in the ECEC classroom has been quite limited. The few studies

available were conducted almost exclusively in northern Europe.

Despite of the relevance of this topic and all the efforts to study and to promote

participation, we are still far from achieving this goal. Participation often takes the

passive connotation of the child having been 'listened to' or 'consulted'. There is still

much uncertainty about the proper mechanisms to involve children and in which

decisions, activities, or subject areas (Clark, 2005; Horwath, Hodgkiss, Kalyva, &

Spyrou, 2011; Sinclair, 2004). Evidence also shows that children in high-quality ECEC

settings report they were often involved in situations in which they participated,

negotiated, and made decisions. However, due to restrictions placed on their influence

they rarely seemed to effectively participate and impact the overall ECEC organization:

its routines, contents, and activities, (Sheridan, 2007).

Promoting participation in pedagogical settings means wanting and being able to

assess the interests of the child (Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010) and in fact, although

different approaches have contributed to this debate and to increased openness to listen to children's ideas about their experiences of the world, such contributions do not seem to be enough to guarantee that their voices and points of view have been effectively heard and considered (James, 2007). Moreover, the little empirical evidence on children's ideas about participation, namely may be at least partially explained by the lack of sound measures. In order to develop a sound measure and contribute to the study of children's participation right in ECEC we have developed and tested a structured interview protocol to assess children's views, perceptions, and expectations about participation and the implementation of participation practices in ECEC classrooms. This study presents the "Choosing Classrooms: A Structured Interview on Children's Right to Participate" protocol as well as the results of a pilot study in Portuguese ECEC settings.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Data was collected in 2014/2015, in public and private ECEC settings, mostly from the Lisbon area (except one from the Algarve region), Portugal. The participants were 43 children (18 boys), with ages ranging between 50 and 79 months ($M = 66.92$, $SD = 7.36$), who were attending 7 ECEC classrooms. These classrooms previously received high scores on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008) in a previous research project, with values ranging from 5.72 to 6.69 for the dimension of emotional support ($M = 6.17$, $SD = 0.26$) and from 5.25 to 6.42, for the dimension of organizational support ($M = 5.81$, $SD = 0.51$).

2.2 Measure

Two distinct classrooms are represented in "Choosing Classrooms: A Structured Interview on Children's Right to Participate". During the presentation, two illustrative images, specifically designed to fit one of two distinct narratives (i.e., participation vs. non-participation) are shown to the child. The narratives were constructed to be similar in their content, except one referred to a classroom in which the teacher listened to children and children could choose (i.e. participation), and in the other the teacher was responsible for decisions and children could not choose (i.e. non-participation). These two narratives are further described in Table 1.

Table 1

Participation and non-participation narratives

Narrative	Description
Participation (A)	"In this classroom, the teacher asks boys and girls what they want to do and asks their opinion about many things. Boys and girls can choose with whom they want to play with and the areas they want to go to. Some boys and girls choose to play in the carpet, others choose to play in the house corner, and others choose to play games. In this classroom, what boys and girls say is very important!"
Non-participation (B)	"In this classroom, the teacher often tells boys and girls what they have to do. It is the teacher who chooses with whom boys and girls can play with and which areas they can go to. Some boys and girls have to play on the carpet, others have to play in the house corner, and others have to play games. In this classroom, what the teacher says is very important!"

Following the presentation of each narrative and respective image, the children were asked questions developed from a review of the literature (e.g., Pramling, 1983; Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001; Sheridan, 2007; Tangen, 2008). The objective

of the questions was to elicit in the children responses in three different areas during the individual interview. The first set of questions was about children's conceptions of participation in the classroom and it provided a means to analyze each classroom. The second set of questions keyed into children's expectations about participation which allowed a comparison between classrooms. The third set sought children's perceptions about participation, eliciting comparison with the child's own classroom.

Beyond the care taken with the narratives and questions, visual props were used to support the narrative and facilitate children's comprehension. Images were drawn so that both images had exactly the same elements and areas, but differed in their neutral colors, trying to do not lead to associations with 'right' or 'wrong', 'masculine' or 'feminine' (i.e., they were normative and equivalent in their content). Also with the purpose of facilitating children's comprehension and making the task agreeable to the children, a small doll was introduced in one set of questions. The interview questions were carefully read to each child. The presentation order of the images, narratives, and questions were counterbalanced between applications. The interview protocol included the steps described in Table 2. The images, also presented in Table 2, are available from the authors in full quality, upon request.

Table 2

Interview protocol

Step	Instruction/Questions	Material	Goal

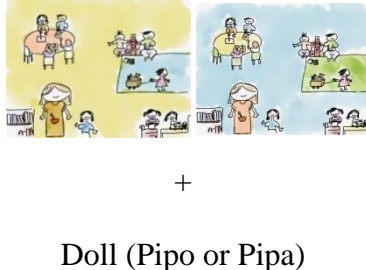|			
1. Introduction	The researcher presents the task: "Let's talk about some things boys and girls do in preschool, ok? What do you most like to do in preschool? There are very different preschool classrooms, do you know? I'll show you two images, of two classrooms, and I'll tell you how they are…"	—	To explain the task
2. Presentation of each narrative, with a supporting image, followed by three questions each	The researcher reads the narrative A (or B), while presenting an image, followed by four questions: (i) What do you think about this classroom? (ii) How do you think boys and girls feel in this classroom? (iii) What do you think these boys and girls think of their classroom? (iv) What do you think boys and girls do in this classroom?[a] The researcher repeats the previous step, using the remaining narrative and image.	Image X + Narrative A or Image Y + Narrative B 	To assess children's conceptions of participation

3. Presentation of both images simultaneously, comparing the two classrooms and introducing a small doll, followed by four questions	The researcher gives the instruction, while presenting a small doll (adjusting to the gender of the child, i.e., 'Pipo' for boys and 'Pipa' for girls), followed by 4 questions: "Now, let's look at these two pictures at the same time. Here we have 'Pipo'/'Pipa', who will soon start preschool, and he/she can choose which classroom to go to. In which of these two classrooms do you think Pipo/Pipa…" (i) … would feel better? (ii)… would have more fun? (iii) … would learn more? (iv) … would like the most?	Images X and Y + Doll (Pipo or Pipa)	To assess children's expectations regarding participation
4. Presentation of both images simultaneously, followed by of a question	(i) Which classroom do you think is most similar to yours? (ii) Which of these two teachers is most similar to yours?ᵃ Why?ᵃ	Images X and Y 	To assess children's perceptions of participation
5. Presentation of a last questionᵃ	Please tell me what activities have you already done in your classroom today. Who chose them?	—	To assess children's perception of participation

ᵃ Questions introduced after data collection for the pilot study, based on children's responses and peer feedback.

After conducting this pilot study, a new question was included in step 2 of the protocol. The purpose was to assess a behavioral dimension of children's conceptions of participation – "What do you think boys and girls do in this classroom?" Also in step 4, two new questions regarding children's perceptions – "Which of these two teachers is most similar to yours? Why?" were added to obtain specific information about

children's ideas of teacher practices. Lastly, a fifth step was added, "Please tell me what activities have you already done in your classroom today. Who chose them?" to more specifically assess the behavioral dimension of children's perceptions about participation experiences in their own classrooms.

2.3. Procedure

In each classroom, six typically developing children were selected, based on age and gender. Although the goal was to interview three boys and three girls in each classroom, aged 5 and 6 years-old, it was not possible to strictly follow these criteria in all classrooms due to the classroom's daily routine or a lack of 5 and 6 year-old boys and girls in the classroom. All parents of participating children previously authorized their participation, by signing an informed consent form, and children's verbal assent was also obtained (i.e., refusals to participate were respected). Children were interviewed in their own ECEC setting, in a private room, and each individual interview lasted from 15 to 20 minutes. Children's responses to the interview were coded through content analysis, with categories emerging inductively from the data.

3. Results

When asked in the introductory question about what they most like to do in preschool, 90.69% of the children answered they preferred to play, whether activities inside the classroom (e.g., "play hairdressers", "play with puzzles"), or outdoor activities (e.g., "play soccer", "play with the girls outside"). Some children stated their preferred activity was to work (e.g., "work with the teacher") and less common examples of preferences were drawing, doing extra-curricular activities, or helping others.

Children's answers to the three questions regarding their conceptions about participation and non-participation classrooms (i.e., "What do you think about this classroom?", "How do you think boys and girls feel in this classroom?", and "What do you think these boys and girls think about their classroom?") were grouped in different categories. Table 3 presents category frequencies and examples of children's answers that were coded in each category.

Table 3

Results From Content Analysis: Categories on Children's Conceptions About Participation and Non-participation Classrooms

Category	Participation		Non-participation		Examples
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	
What do you think about this classroom?					
Positive description	29	67.44	24	55.81	"good", "beautiful", "nice" "well", funny"
Negative description	1	2.33	6	13.95	"bad", "horrible", "very weird", "I don't like it that much", "untidy", "behaves badly"
Neutral answer	5	11.63	6	13.95	"more or less", "I don't know", "different"
It is the teacher who chooses	3	4.65	4	9.30	"children do what the teacher says", "the teacher doesn't let children choose the areas where to play"
It is to play	5	11.63	5	11.63	"all children are playing", "it has toys"
It is to work	2	4.65	4	9.30	"it is to work", "it has pencils", "it is to study"
How do you think boys and girls feel in this classroom?					
Positive feelings	38	88.37	31	72.09	"well", "very well", "happy", "good", "better", "they like it"
Negative feelings	1	2.33*	8	18.60*	"sad", "bad"
What do you think these boys and girls think about their classroom?					
Positive description	22	51.16	15	43.88	"happy", "nice", "they like a lot", "beautiful", "fresh", "funny", "good"

Negative description	2	4.65	3	6.98	"untidy", "very untidy", "they don't like it", "sad"
Neutral answer	3	6.98	7	16.28	"I don't know", "different", "more or less", "some think it is ok, others don't"
Children can choose	5	11.63*	0	0.00*	"the teacher is very good", "they think they can do anything", "the teacher is very important because she lets them choose and do important things"
It is the teacher who chooses	0	0.00*	8	18.60*	"the teacher is very bad", "children should know the area in which they are going to play", "the teacher says everything" , "the teacher orders"
It is to play	10	23.26	7	16.28	"they're thinking in playing, play games and play in the home corner", "doing puzzles, "they have more toys"

*$p < .05$.

Categories with total observed counts (considering both participation and non-participation classrooms) inferior to 5 were not included in the table. The Chi-square test was performed to examine the independence of categories and narratives. Monte Carlo simulation was used to ensure statistical accuracy, whenever the assumptions of χ^2 were not verified (Marôco, 2011). As shown in Table 3, results evidenced statistically significant differences for the categories of 'negative feelings' ($\chi^2(1) = 6.10$, $p = .01$, $N = 86$), 'children can choose' ($\chi^2(1) = 5.31$, $p = .02$, $N = 86$), and 'it is the teacher who chooses' ($\chi^2(1) = 8.82$, $p < .001$, $N = 86$), suggesting these categories were not independent of the narrative presented. Specifically, negative feelings emerged more frequently associated with the non-participation classroom as well as the category regarding teachers' choice/decision making. Children's choices were more frequently associated with the participation classroom.

Children's answers and comments regarding their expectations about participation and non-participation classrooms (for questions focusing on which classroom would children "feel better", "have more fun", "learn more", or "like the most") are presented in Table 4. Results indicated statistically significant differences for the answers regarding the classroom in which children "feel better" ($\chi^2(1) = 10.26$, $p < .001$, $N = 43$), "have more fun" ($\chi^2(1) = 12.30$, $p < .001$, $N = 43$), and "like the most" ($\chi^2(1) = 8.40$, $p < .001$, $N = 43$). Specifically, children's responses suggest they prefer the participation classroom, based on the expectation of feeling better and having more fun there than in the non-participation classroom.

Table 4

Results From Content Analysis: Categories on Children's Expectations When Comparing Participation and Non-participation Classrooms

Question	Participation		Non-participation		Comments
	n	*%*	*n*	*%*	
… would feel better	32	74.41*	11	25.58*	"because she loves it", "because the other is to impose and this one is not" (participation)
… would have more fun	33	76.74*	10	23.26*	"because she can do what she wants to" (participation), "because she prefers to draw and in this classroom she can do it, in the other one the teacher is bossy and she doesn't have fun at all" (non-participation)
… would learn more	27	62.79	16	37.21	"to do works the teacher says", "because the teacher says they have to work", "because it is the teacher who orders" (non-participation)
… would like the most	31	72.09*	12	27.91*	"because this teacher is very good", "because we can play our way", "because they can choose

	the areas where to play" (participation)

* $p < .05$.

Results on children's perceptions about participation (i.e., focusing on the

comparison between the classrooms presented and the child's own classroom) indicated

that 51.16% of children identified their classroom as a participation classroom (e.g.,

"because sometimes we can choose the areas in which we want to play", "because in my

classroom children can choose where to play, the teacher only says our names when we

have to work"), whereas 49.19% children identified their classroom to be a non-

participation classroom (e.g., "the teacher is bossy and children can't choose"). These

differences were not statistically significant.

Finally, log-linear and chi-square tests were performed to test for differences as a

function of children's gender and age for all categories analyzed, but no statistically

significant differences were found.

4. Discussion

In this study, we sought to give children a voice on their participation in ECEC

settings by developing a measure to assess children's conceptions, expectations, and

perceptions on the matter. We conducted a pilot study to test how 5 and 6 year old

children attending ECEC responded to the "Choosing Classrooms" structured interview

in order to determine its usefulness in eliciting children's ideas about differing

participation experiences.

Play clearly emerged as children's preferred activity in ECEC settings. Although

emerging in the context of an introductory question, this finding is consistent with

previous reports that if they could decide by themselves what they would like to do in

ECEC, children would decide to play (Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001). In Sheridan and Pramling Samuelsson, the opportunity for children to play without disruptions, with access to materials and activities, is described as an indicator of high-quality ECEC settings. In addition, children's ECEC activities should include the ability to exercise choice in play opportunities, as a way for them to experience their right to participate and exert influence (Bae, 2009).

The children in our sample were selected from ECEC classrooms that had previously received high process quality scores. This decision was based on the expectation that children in these classrooms - likely with more participation experiences - would be knowledgeable sources on this topic. Results indicated children consider they have more opportunities to make choices in the classroom characterized by the participation narrative. These findings are consistent with reports from both Sheridan (2007), and Sheridan and Pramling Samuelsson (2001), suggesting participation practices are associated with more opportunities for the child to decide and exercise influence.

Regarding children's expectations, the participation classroom was consistently described as the one in which children would feel better, have more fun, and liked the most, suggesting young children seemed to make a clear distinction between the two types of classrooms described in the interview, valuing more the classrooms in which participation occurred. On the contrary, the non-participation classroom was more associated with negative feelings, and was also seen as a place in which the adult decides more. Predominant decision-making by the adult has been described in the literature as a characteristic of non-participation contexts, whereas the principles and democratic values of redistribution of power between adults and children, decision-

sharing, and children's involvement in decision-making, have been described as typical of participation contexts (e.g., Hart, 1997; Sinclair, 2004).

When asked to indicate which of the classrooms presented was more similar to their own, almost half of the children identified their classroom with the classroom characterized by the non-participation narrative, which means their opportunities to participate and exercise influence may have been limited. This result was not expected, as all children in this sample attended high-quality classrooms, where they were supposed to experience more opportunities to participate (Sheridan, 2007). Previous research also suggested that although children attending a high-quality ECEC setting are more likely to decide about activities and initiate play by themselves, as well as make decisions about their own belongings, they rarely seem to influence the overall organisation routines or the activities initiated by teachers. A possible explanation for this apparent contradiction is the difficulty teachers experience in knowing what children can effectively decide and how they can be involved in decision-making (Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001). It is our purpose to further explore the relations between children's attitudes, concepts, and experiences of volitional participation and different levels of quality in ECEC settings.

The participants in this study were 5 and 6 year-old children, which may constitute a limitation. Subsequent applications of this measure should consider both additional indicators of reliability (e.g., test-retest) and validity combined with a larger sample size which should include younger children.

Nevertheless, this work presents a new structured interview protocol that may allow researchers to assess children's ideas about participation in ECEC settings. Our findings suggest that in classrooms where participation is predominant, children expect to feel better and have more fun, which are central aspects of children's well-being.

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