START THE CHANGE!

STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION: POLICY AND PRACTICE TO START THE CHANGE

Desk Research Report

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INTRODUCTION

It is clear that from the developmental perspective of children, in order to maximize their health and well-being at school and in life, encouraging participation is vital for them to thrive.

The numerous benefits of youth participation at school are explored in the first half of this paper.

At the same time we have explored the main challenges to participation, the first one being that "Adults are (better than children themselves) capable of estimating children's needs and their best interest."

In the second half of this paper, we will see whether and how children and students are involved in participation at the educational policy-making level across Europe, and what the main challenges are to true participation at this higher, yet hands-on level.

As with school participation, we will see that participation in policy-making is a positive development. Not only does it foster problem-solving skills, it allows students to learn the skills necessary to be an active member of society and fosters a deep understanding of issues. (Brouwer, 2015). In terms of challenges, we will see also here echoes of the idea that adults are 'more capable' than children. In addition, we will look a participation in policy-making through a top-down European-values lens, demonstrating two specific challenges. Firstly, whether current participation initiatives are truly representative of the diversity of students and whether real partnership between students and policy-makers is being developed through current participation initiatives. Finally, we will explore briefly how we could overcome the issues of representation and partnership.

The authors

CONTEXT OF THE DESK RESEARCH

As the existing research points to a growing tension between cultures and communities and, even in the educational context, increasingly pronounced intolerant attitudes and behaviours, as well as violence motivated by hatred towards various communities and groups, the Consortium of 8 partner organizations led by Forum for Freedom of Education decided to address these challenges through the **"Start the change – creating a generation of change makers through intercultural education and volunteering" (STC) project**. The Consortium consists of:

- The Forum for Freedom in Education, Croatia
- INOVA+ – INNOVATION SERVICES, Portugal
- Macedonian Civic Education Center (MCEC), North Macedonia
- Network of Education Policy Centers (NEPC)
- SIRIUS Policy Network on Migrant Education, Belgium
- Osnovna škola Ivana Mestrovica, Hrvatska
- José Estêvão Secondary School, Portugal
- State Municipal School "Nikola Karev" – Strumica (VET), North Macedonia

STC is a three-year project co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union under the Key Action 3 (Social inclusion).

General objective of the project is to prevent and combat radicalization and extremism among young people by promoting democratic and EU common values, fundamental rights, social inclusion, media literacy, intercultural understanding and active citizenship. Based on above, **two main goals** of the project are:

- Developing social **inclusion practices in schools and local communities** by implementing the whole-school approach model,
- Developing **inclusive social educational policies on local, national, EU and international level** by using a threefold approach – informing policy makers, involving policy-makers and advocating to policy makers.

Furthermore, for the Consortium to be able to reach the abovementioned goal on the policy level, as a part of preparation for the future policy event "**Policy and Practice to Start the Change**", NEPC and SIRIUS conducted the background desk analysis and literature overview on the topic of students' participation. As the Consortium agreed to emphasise the importance of students' voice throughout the project, Jelena Vranješević for NEPC explored the importance of students' participation on school and education level, and Mialy Dermish from SIRIUS explored students' participation from the level of policy making.

All in all, authors tried to provide answers to the following questions:

- Why is students' participation important?
- What are common obstacles for students' participation?
- To what extent can students participate in policy making on educational level?
- What are the main challenges they are facing?

Answers to these questions and gathered information, both from the theory and practice exploration, can be found on the following pages.

More information about the project is available at the official project website: https://startthechange.net/.

1. STUDENTS´ PARTICIPATION AS A CHILD´S HUMAN RIGHT:

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) introduces participation as: a) one of the four principles on which CRC is based together with non/discrimination, the best interest of child and life, survival and development, b) group of participative rights, so called civil rights (privacy, information, freedom of thoughts, conscience and religion, freedom of expression, right to receive and impart information and ideas, freedom of association and peaceful assembly) and c) special article no 12 (the child has rights to express his/her views freely in all matters affecting him/her, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child).

Article 12 means that:

- Every child is capable of expressing his/her views (perspective, needs, feelings...) according to his/her age and evolving capacities. Adults' role is to find the best communication channel through which the child can express its views. The basic question that adults should ask when consulting children is not Do they understand or not?, but What should we do to make them understand us? Would they understand us if they had more information, or if they were asked in a different way?

- Child should express his/her views in all matters that affect him/her. Research shows that the range of areas that children would like to comment on and the range of areas that adults think children should comment on differ significantly. For children, everyday decisions such as where to go, who to hang out with, what to do, are just as important as decisions regarding more distant goals, such as e.g. which school to enrol, what courses to take, what kind of extracurricular activities to choose, etc. This does not mean that children do not see these long-term decisions as important, but that everyday "now and here" decisions, which adults do not even mention, are equally important to them (Kelley, Mayall & Hood, 1997). Adults must broaden their perception about the matters that affect children. There are a lot of things that affect children directly that adults do not perceive as such. "You have to ask children's opinion on everything because they are members of society. They are directly involved in different areas, such as education and yet they are never consulted about the" („Kids these days...", 1999 : 136)

- Children should be able to express their views FREELY. Adults are obliged to enable the free expression of the child's opinion, by creating a safe and stimulating environment for that.

- The child's opinion is paid attention to and the child's opinion is respected (according to age and evolving capacities). This does not mean that all children's demands are necessarily met, but it does mean that children's opinions are taken into account as relevant when making decisions that directly affect them. That means also that adults are obliged to give the child an explanation how they will consider his/her opinion, as well as to explain the reasons for not respecting that opinion in a certain situation (as they would do when it comes to communication between two adults).

According to the **participation ladder** (Hart, 1992) there are several ways of participation:

- Children are informed - this is the first level of genuine participation (as opposed to quasi-participation). Although children are not involved in designing the project, they are fully informed about the goals of the project, understand those goals and voluntarily get involved in one part of the implementation of that project. The adults have control to make all decisions during the project including the ways children will be involved.

- Children are consulted – Children are not only informed about the project they are involved in, but they are also consulted, i.e. they have the opportunity to express their perspective concerning some aspects of the project. Children are treated as "experts for their own experience", who teach adults about their perspective and needs. "Somehow educators have forgotten the important connection between teachers and students. We listen to outside experts to inform us, and, consequently, we overlook the treasure in our very own backyards: our students" (SooHoo, 1993: 390).

- Children are involved in decision making process (either alone or in cooperation with adults) - This is a form of participation in which children have control over the process and participate in decision-making. The important difference between consultation level and this one is redistribution of power, i.e. adults share power and control over the process with children.

2. OBSTACLES FOR STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION

Participation has been (more than any other right in CRC) topic of many debates and discussions because it introduces the concept of child as a **subject** of rights. Instead of perceiving the child as the immature, incomplete and passive object of adults' protection (protective rights) or the object of adults' care and nurture (provisional rights), participation introduces the image of the child as the (pro)active and competent partner in the process of (co)construing its own social reality. While protection and provision narratives focus on needs, participation introduces the concept of competencies/evolving capacities that enable children to be actively involved in all decision that might affect them, thus opposing dominant "regimes of truth" when it comes to the image of the child.

There are various obstacles, both on the individual level (teachers' idea of the nature of the child and the role of participation in development and learning) and on the structural level (educational system that is adult-centric and non-inclusive when it comes to students' participation). The most common misconceptions that leads to students' marginalization in education are:

- Adult are (better than children themselves) capable of estimating children's needs and their best interest. The root of this misconception is the image of the child that is dominant in a society that determines accepted models of the relationship between children and adults, power structure and the treatment of children. According to that image the child is incompetent, immature and unreliable source of information about its own perspective. This argument is not sustainable from the point of view of a (socio) constructivist approach that perceive the child seen as a scientist, active in constructing knowledge about the world around him (Piaget), a creator of meaning (Bruner) and a partner in asymmetric interaction (Vygotsky). Children are not passive recipients of environmental influences, but actively learn and design the world around them, in cooperation with adults. The age and competencies of children cannot be the argument for not listening to them, especially in the period of middle childhood and adolescence, since this is the period when the important competencies for complex forms of participation develop (Lansdown, 2005; Vranješević, 2004). Examples of consultations with children in primary and secondary schools show that most students (regardless of age) are extremely competent to discuss about the curriculum and the learning process, although (especially younger students) they are not always able to articulate their perspective using the language of formal education (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004).

- Participation is not always in the best interest of children, protection must come before participation – this argument justifies more subtle form of discrimination, expressed as the protection of children and an attempt to ensure their best interests. In this case, discrimination is based on the belief of teachers that they can define themselves (without consulting students) what is reflected in the safety of children and what is in their best interest.

- Participation in decision making process will lead to anarchy – it is impossible to meet the needs of all children.
  Teachers often completely ignore the possibility of consulting students on various aspects of school life, because they connect the consultation process with meeting all the needs and requirements of children (Vranješević, 2012). This is about not understanding the essence of the consultative process, i.e. mixing consultation with children and children's participation in the decision-making process. Consultation with students implies that their opinion is seriously taken into account when making decisions, that it is treated equally as the opinion of teachers and that, if a decision is made that is not in line with the attitudes and needs of students, that decision is clearly reasoned. It can lead to more complex participation in the decision-making process, but even then it does not mean that the needs of children must be met, nor that the opinion of teachers is a second-order opinion. The consultation process helps teachers to decentralize, to look at problems from the perspective of students and to make the decisions they make in line with the needs of children and their best interests. This does not mean a loss of authority (as some teachers think), but its redefining in the direction of mutual respect and cooperation, which leads to a better relationship between teachers and students, encouraging motivation to learn and participate in school, which has already been discussed.

- Students' should not be consulted/involved in decision making process in matters that do not affect them directly.
  This argument is also the basis for discrimination against children, since it is assumed that adults are the only ones who can. According to some studies, there are a lot of areas in school life that students are not directly influenced by, according to their teachers. Teachers agree that the topics that will be covered, the goals of the classes and the textbooks that are used are not of direct interest to children, since they would not ask for children's opinion on that. Also, children's opinions are rarely sought when it comes to areas that go beyond the scope of a particular classroom: school rules - rules of conduct in school, the work of school services, the possibility of evaluating teachers and their work, evaluation of programs implemented in school, cooperation with parents and possible forms of cooperation, professional development of teachers, etc. (Vranješević, 2012).

- "Participation is time consuming". There is no time for student's participation in our school". Participation is not integral part of school experience, that is why it is perceived as additional effort/burden and time-consuming activity (Vranješević, 2012). The reason why teachers see the consultation process as a burden can only be partly explained by the idea they have about its essence and goals, and it is largely conditioned by the system of values, norms and rules on which the school is based: does it really matter what the kids think? How is the practice of counselling children related to counselling adults (parents and teachers) at school? How is the consultation process woven into the organizational culture and ethos of the school? To what extent do cultural norms and school values include listening to children in the educational process and understanding the school as a "learning community"? These are all central issues that indicate the place that the consultative process has in school practice and school culture (Vranješević, 2012).

3. PARTICIPATION AND WELL BEING

Student wellbeing is defined as a sustainable state of positive mood and attitude, resilience, and satisfaction with self, relationships and experiences at school. It consists of emotional component (positive affect), coping component (resilience), cognitive component (satisfaction with relationships and other dimensions of one's life) and a performance component (effective functioning and the maximizing of one's potential). Student wellbeing is described as pervasive in that it affects most aspects of a student's functioning at school. A student's level of wellbeing is indicated by the degree to which the student demonstrates effective academic and social and emotional functioning and appropriate behaviour at school (ACU, 2008). Wellbeing is the degree to which a student feels good in the school environment (De Fraine et al., 2005) as well as the degree to which a student is functioning effectively in the school community (Fraillon, 2004).

Researchers identified the following pathways with potential to foster the development of student wellbeing: a) physical and emotional safety b) a supportive and caring school community c) pro-social values d) social and emotional learning e) a strengths-based approach f) a sense of meaning and purpose (ACU, 2008). Students' participation is an important integral aspect of all six pathways.

Physical and emotional safety and a supportive environment

One of the main goals of educational systems is to create **safe and supportive** environment for development and learning. Education must be available to all students (article 28) and it has to be of a good quality, i.e. it has to develop students' potentials to the fullest (article 29). There are many examples, initiatives of students' participation in the improving the quality of education in terms of both safe and supportive environment for learning.

The importance of consultation process with students is threefold. First, consulting students help adults to decenter, i.e. to understand the students' perspective. Consulting students in some schools about the problems they have been facing showcased the great difference between teachers' and students' perspective. Students considered as important some problems that teachers do not see as important at all, such as diversity, quantity and quality of meals in student' cafeteria, crowds in cafeteria and lack of time to finish the meal, class schedule after the school brakes etc. (Bennathan, 2012). The difference of

adults' and children's perspective is visible also when it comes to some issues connected with the quality of teaching process. Within the project Effective learning, teachers in one middle school in Cambridge wanted to know what their students think about criteria for evaluation. Consultation with students revealed completely different perspective concerning the clarity of criteria for different achievement levels, usefulness of feedback given through certain grades, as well as motivational effect of the critique that was the most common motivator among teachers (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). Consulting children also helps adults to gain a better insight into the problems that children are facing. In one study of peer violence in schools, it became clear that students' main concern was where the violence takes place (which places in school are the least safe) and not who are the bullies and victims (Rowe, 1999). In other studies about the conditions of successful learning, teachers understood the importance of peer learning, as well as problems students faced concerning the lack of time for certain activities and inability to participate in school time management (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004). When it comes to the best interest of the child, consultation with students increase the probability of making decisions that are in their best interest. For example, consultations with children about school violence (who are the most common bullies, where does the violence happen and in what form) and their suggestions for prevention, have helped teachers in some schools to create a program to protect children from violence (Charlton, 2012). In other research, consulting children and respecting their perspective has led to major changes in different aspects of education: increased child safety (Bennathan, 2012), changing the relationship between curricular and extracurricular activities and greater child participation in choosing both curricular (choice of content / topics and learning methods) and extracurricular activities (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004), increased participation of children with special educational needs in choosing knowledge assessment methods (final tests) and assess the adequacy of professional support (Armstrong & Galloway , 2012), as well as better adaptation of the school to marginalized groups - children who have learning difficulties, children from different ethnic groups, etc. (Davie & Galloway, 2012).

Besides consultation process students can participate in project/research more directly. Exploring children's perspectives often results in actions proposed and managed by children themselves, such as a team of peer counsellors that was formed in one school to provide support to children who are victims of violence (Sharp et al., 1994). Students can also be involved in development of project/research design (Pešić et al.,1999), in the implementation and evaluation phase (Vranjesevic, 2015), or during the promotion of the outcomes of the research/project (Vranjesevic, 2015).

The aim of all joint projects in which the students and teachers work together should be to enable students to initiate and manage their own projects/actions. There are the examples of students' initiatives aiming at improvement of the quality of educational process and different aspects of the school life. Within Students' leadership project (Roberts & Nash, 2009) students' were encouraged to explore different aspects of the school life they would like to improve/change.

Research process was designed as „seven steps journey"(Roberts & Nash, 2009: 179), each of them beginning with one question:

- What I would like to change?
- What information do I need? What I would like to know?
- How am I going to get those information?
- How to organize data I get?
- How to interpret data?
- How to tell others what I have learned from those data?
- How can I continue to contribute to school improvement (change)?

Students are doing researches on their own and the role of teachers is to support their research efforts, by encouraging questions and critical reflection, facilitating meetings and encouraging cooperative decision making and helping students to gain important research competencies necessary for becoming agents of change. Another examples of children's independent initiatives could be found in Children Research Centre[1] where children from 9 to 18 years old explore issues they find important, conduct research independently, analyse and present research findings[2].

Pro-social values and social and emotional learning

According to many studies, students' participation fosters development of competencies that are necessary for growing up in democratic societies. Through the process of participation children acquire knowledge, skills and values that prepare them for more complex forms of participation in the adult life. From the developmental point of view participation provide continuity between childhood and adulthood because it provides development of competencies such as critical thinking, autonomy, responsibility that are required for every adult citizen in any democratic society. Competencies developed through participation are:

- Critical thinking, metacognition, inductive and deductive reasoning, problem solving skills, analytical skills, etc. (Hart, 1997; Lansdown, 2005; Kellet, 2005)
- Autonomy in learning, self-regulation, organizing and planning skills (Kellet, 2003)

[1] http://childrens-research-centre.open.ac.uk

[2] For more information on children's projects go to: http://www.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/childrens-research-centre/research-children-young-people

- Development of communication competencies: listening skills, expressing attitudes, feelings and needs in assertive way, conflict resolution skills, team work, cooperation (Hart, 1997)
- Pro-social competencies: empathy for feelings, needs and position of other people, responsibility and care for others, solidarity (Kellet, 2005; Lansdown 2001, 2005)
- Self-esteem and positive self-image (Grover, 2005)

Participation, strength-based approach and sense of meaning

A strengths-based approach is based on the assumption that having the opportunities to use one's strengths in schoolwork or in the general life of the school or classroom produces more positive emotions, leads to higher levels of engagement and produces better learning outcomes, especially for those students whose strengths are not in the traditional academic domain (ACU, 2008). Research showcased the strong relation between students' participation and their proactive attitude toward social environment, self-confidence (Roberts & Nash, 2009) and resilience, especially for the students that come from less privileged groups (Grover, 2005).

A sense of purpose can be defined as involvement in a worthwhile task or activity and it is associated with greater wellbeing. Recent research has highlighted the importance of "student voice" in giving students a sense of meaning and connectedness to the curriculum (ACU, 2008). Experience of participation proves to be efficient way to encourage leadership capacity, i.e. proactive role of children / youth in different aspects of their local community, including schools (Frost & Roberts, 2011). Students who had a chance to participate in different projects/researches often become active advocates for children's / young people's rights (Haines, 1998; Hart, 1997). By participating in different projects, students get to understand why it is important for children to get a voice, they learn how to use their voices effectively, they understand better the mechanisms by which they can influence change and current policies. They develop proactive orientation because they believe that their voice is important and will be respected (NFER, 2006)

4. STUDENTS´ PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION AT THE POLICY LEVEL)

At the turn of the last century much movement was seen on the issue of youth and child participation in policy-making and politics in a range of different areas, including education. With the launch of the 2001 white paper on "A new impetus for European Youth" the European Commission gave voice to young people across Europe. Political will on participation has remained high with European states renewing their commitment through the Regional Ministerial Conference on Education Post-2015 European and North American States Paris Statement in 2015. Motivated by the general trend of more participation and active citizenship, the EU has set up several structured dialogue mechanisms which aim to empower and give voice to young people across the Union and have been copied and replicated within Member states themselves. (European Youth Forum) At the highest level, the EU applies an open method of coordination which is manifested through structured dialogues that occur every 6 months at EU level youth conferences. Education is always given a strong focus within these dialogues and young people are asked to take an active approach (Banjac, 2019; Bee, C & Guerrina, R, 2015)

Despite these formal efforts, we see criticism both of the implicit values one needs to hold to take part in these participation efforts and, the lack of diversity of young people involved in participative efforts (Bee, C & Guerrina, R, 2015). Active citizenship is held as a pre-requisite to taking part in political and policy-processes and schools aim to foster active citizens through civic education.(OECD 2019, Dibou, Tanja) However, for those young people that are not likely to feel engaged in school and are not on a journey towards active citizenship, they remain dis-engaged from participation. From the authors perspectives, this creates a slightly circular logic whereby one must be engaged in school in order to be able to input into how schools are set-up and organized. For those dis-engaged young people 'youth work' has been created (Banjac, 2019; Dibou, 2015). 'Youth work' allows young people to become engaged in issues around them, feel empowered and thus encourages young people to become more active. More work on the efficacy of different types of youth work should be introduced in order to ensure we are including everyone in our participation processes.

In addition, while young people are invited to discussions on certain topics about education, they are rarely, if ever invited to bring issues to the table or co-create solutions. This is somewhat of any oxymoron in the field of education as educational policy-making is often highlighted as one of the most important issues for youth to have input into (European Economic and Social Committee 2008). Many countries, however demonstrate that it is an issue in which children and young people have less decision-making influence over. E.g. in Norway "Decision-making-power is considered weak in policy areas connected to ... school and education ..." (European Commission, EACEA National Policies Platform Youth Wiki Project).

Despite these criticisms, many countries in Europe are making efforts to involve young people and more diverse young people in policy-making in education. Below we have created a table where we demonstrate different stages that countries are at in including young people in educational policy-making. We use the framework developed by (Lofquist, 1989) which divides participation of Hart in the "consulting" and "involved in decision making processes" into three specific stages (Stages 2-4) with stage one as when youth are viewed as objects and are not consulted at all in the policy process. Stage 2 is where youth are viewed as consultants and are asked to review and give feedback on policy, Stage 3- where youth are viewed as resources and are asked to input into planning, evaluating and implementing policy and Stage 4 – where youth are viewed as partners and work together in all stages of the policy-making process. Examples from Stages 2 and 3 are featured here:

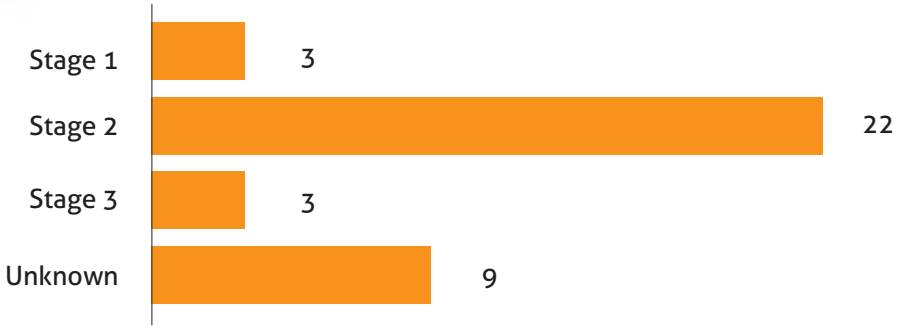
Stage 2 – Germany

"The input requested from young people depends on the consultation held. In the case of the national consultation to develop an independent youth policy, young people were asked to comment on Youth policy, Education, Participation, School, Transition from school to work, Recognition and the solutions suggested by 0the experts." (European Commission, EACEA National Policies Platform Youth Wiki Project

Stage 3 – Cyprus

"The Youth Board of Cyprus usually requests input from the Advisory Body when it comes to policy issues, such as defining goals and objectives."(European Commission, EACEA National Policies Platform Youth Wiki Project)

Out of the countries listed on the Youth Wiki page, we found that 22 were involved in Stage 2 in educational policy-making, 3 were involved in Stage 1 and 2 countries were involve in Stage 2. All countries that were involved in Stage 3 in some areas were also involved in Stage 2 activities in other areas of educational policy-making. Finally, it was unclear which Stage 9 of the countries were as this was not explicitly stated.



Data taken from: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/youthwiki/countries.

While it is encouraging to see that almost all countries are on a journey towards including young people in education policy-making it is disappointing to see that none of the countries have reached a stage where young people are partnering in policy-making of education (Stage 4). In addition, we see that many countries are stuck at Stage 2 and involve young people only in giving feedback on current policy.

Case study

In 2019, Estonia won an OCED award for youth civic engagement and it is one of the most progressive countries in Europe in terms of involving young people in all policy-making including within the education sphere (OECD 2019, Dibou, 2015). The many structured dialogues set up and modelled on the open method of coordination put forward by the EU offers students and children represented by national youth council and many student umbrella organisations opportunities to input into current and future policy. The Ministry of Education notes that these organisations open conversations to "to [the] top level of governance" and the country works hard to engage non-involved youth through a variety of "youth work" programmes (Dibou, 2015) Having noted this, two concerns raised in interviews around the issue of youth participation in policy-making demonstrate clearly the issues of diversity in youth representation and students being viewed in a passive rather than an active role (as consultants in Stage 2 rather than resources or partners in Stage 3 or 4).

Firstly, it has been noted that more marginalised youth (particularly from Russian-speaking backgrounds) are rarely included in the policy-making process and the number of forums open for mother-tongue Russian-speaking youth are not as many as those for Estonian mother-tongue youth. (Dibou, 2015).

Secondly, there are many standard mechanisms to ensure young voices are heard. It was noted by young people themselves that discussion and the opportunity to be consulted itself is not "difficult" (Dibou, 2015), the ability, however, to impact or move decisions is predicated on the attitudes and willingness of the officials involved. (Another echo of adults not seeing children as capable.) Research demonstrates that young people believe that a key measure of whether their contribution is heard or not is the attitude of the adults and officials that they are working with. Dibou also argues that "officials should be prepared to work jointly with young people on an equal partnership." (Dibou, 2019)

However with the help of Dibou, we can offer a framing of these issues above in an emancipatory light, with ideas that both youth themselves could be more involved in developing formats to input into policies but also putting onus on policy-makers themselves to change their attitudes to young people's participation in general. What she wishes to see is more willingness to reach out and broach the challenges of broad youth representation and deeper, more influential participation. Addressing the willingness of adults to see children and youth as 'capable' of forming policy, as mentioned in the outset of this article will allow students to develop the necessary skills to be active in society. Similarly, reaching out to dis-enfranchised students and asking them to design participation processes will allow us to work better in concert with our whole student population bringing well-being to them all.

CONCLUSION

Finally, we see that participation at both the school level and the educational-policy level is a wholly beneficial activity to children and students involved and creates the healthy basis for a democratic and participative society. Participation provides developmental continuity because it enables children to acquire competencies that are important for adulthood, from the earliest age. Besides evident developmental potential, participation also has great transformative potential. It transforms the power relations between children and adults: instead of hierarchical power model in which adults exercise all power just because they are adults, participation advocated for cooperative power relations that are based on dialogue, negotiation and cooperation between children and adults. Participation requires redefinition of the traditional children's and adults' roles (Clark, 2010). Adults need to have the role of both teacher and student: they support child development, encourages their competencies, and, at the same time, they learn while working with them (Rinaldi, 2001). Some authors call this role "authentic novice" (Clark & Moss, 2005), because the adult gives up the privilege of knowing everything and he/she is sincerely (authentically) interested in understanding and learning about the child's perspective. Adults use their power to create a context for learning in which children can play an active role in co-construction of knowledge (Rogoff, 2003). Transformation of dominant power structure between adults and children, as well as their traditional roles, leads to a reconsideration of the traditional image of the child and has the emancipatory potential. Children are seen as experts for their experience, active learners, who are granted the status of citizens, fully capable to be proactive participants in their communities.

Achieving this status, however, is more challenging than it looks. The main barriers are:

1. the mechanisms and organizations set up to generate participation, which can be exclusive to young people from diverse backgrounds, and

2. the attitudes of adults to allow real partnership and view students and children as capable of contributing to these conversations.

Once we have undertaken work to loosen the dynamics of participation and encourage diverse youth to show us how they wish to participate we will be on our way to more accurate representation of the young people in our societies. Similarly, if we can work closely with policy-makers and school staff to detail the benefits and importance of participation, we may succeed in changing the dynamic of participation from one of 'children as consultants' to one of 'children as resources or even partners.' We thus, need more efforts in and around the space of participation to ensure it is a meaningful endeavour.

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