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## 86.1 Introduction

It is legitimate to wonder why in the last two decades reflection, debate, and controversy about children's social participation has become so important. Regardless of the multiple responses that such a question could evoke, we believe that what is important is to show that such participation, in all the modalities it can assume, finds its real political, social, cultural, and economic significance in its relationship with the well-being of not only children but society as a whole. In this regard, Judith Ennew (1999) asked:

Why should it be that children's voices and children's participation are being advocated at this stage in history? The rhetorical question posed a century and a half ago by K. Marx in a contribution to the critique of political economy, 'Does not the child in every epoch represent the character of the period in its natural veracity?', raises a query for the present, 'Why is it therefore that at the end of the second millennium there is such a strong argument for children to "participare" and be heard?'

## 86.2 The Central Thesis Behind this Chapter

Historical experience - despite its sparseness (E. Rothchild 1999, pp. 40-46) - makes evident the active role that children have played in certain social, political,

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economical, and cultural contexts. It is important to remember their participation in armed conflicts, rural work, mining, insurgency, and the defense of citizen rights. However, audacious initiatives are registered from groups of children demanding to rethink the ideas, social representations, and affective culture that adult society had built before of them (Becchi 1996; Nasaw 1995; Moreira 1997, p. 17; Rojas 2010). The children never gave up being an active minority, or as Serge Moscovici would say: the children never gave up the capacity of making themselves valuable to their environment, their society, and, in the native context, as members of their ethnic group, as valuable interlocutors (Corsaro 2011, p. 119) in what concerns their collectivity. The central thesis of this chapter is that children are not objects of protection because of their limitations, incapacities, or immaturity. Children, like every other member of *Homo sapiens*, are social beings, interdependent, and needed, and as such they are urged to be themselves, to develop their condition as unique beings, born from autonomy, and have responsible self-determination. The fact that they are like all the other human beings, in permanent need to keep being thanks to others, does not make them inferior or insignificant. That is why the paradigm of protection is an ideological product of the social hegemonic contract and the role of predominance that is assigned to the adult world and is not something inherent in the child's condition, that is, a being in development. Throughout history, the positive right and the norms have put themselves in charge to reinforce and to naturalize. Basically, to say that children are objects of special protection is a subliminal form of recognizing that societies tend to discriminate against those who it considers to be responsible for their own "unprotection."

Education as social practice and the processes of socialization aim to promote the potential of every human being, that everyone can be responsible for himself as a condition for becoming free. Therefore, without denying the right to protection, the perspective of the paradigm of the promotion of *protagonist* participation constitutes the topic of this chapter.

This is what in Central and South America is called being coprotagonist of one's own collective and personal history and this is where collective and personal dignity takes shape. If, in a certain cultural context, it becomes a reality - even if the word *protagonism* is not included in the semantics of the many languages - it is reality in the world of the native people of our America by which the *cosmoexperience* of every human being is a part of that being's entire living environment. This perspective was indirectly referred to in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and in what, for some qualified authors, (expert or scholars) has to be understood as the right to political participation. If, in accordance with Rajani (1999, p. 1), the interest in children's political participation was evident, how it can seriously be established in the heart or in formal politics is still uncertain.

In the third part of this chapter we provide some examples of promotion of organized protagonist participation of children in Asia, Africa, and in our America and their capacity of incidence. Those examples show that it is necessary to reconceptualize children's participation. In the same way that the CRC was received with worldwide approval, even if it was not always transformed into political will and concrete action for its real application, children's participation runs the risk of

becoming formally accepted and institutionalized which makes it functional for the dominating interests in a determined society, leaving the adult-centered culture untouched. Participation from the paradigm of the promotion of child protagonism does not leave untouched the actual generational division of power.

### 86.3 The Chapter in Six Points

This chapter approaches the issue of participation of children in the framework of the *well-being* of society as a whole using six main points:

1. First, to speak of participation in an exclusionary way makes it insignificant and unreal in the framework of the so-called hegemonic paradigm of protection.
2. The second point is the need for another social paradigm which the CRC in some way replaces with so-called wide-ranging protection, but as a paradigmatic transition within the inherited thinking of modernity.
3. The reconceptualized participation from the paradigm of the promotion of the protagonist is addressed as the third point.
4. The fourth point aims to make protagonist participation a component of a new social contract *from and with* the childhoods (understood as the diversity of children in space and time) (From the point of view of cultural and social context there are so many ways of being and playing roles as a Child).
5. With the fifth point, we present current conceptual and practical challenges to the participation of children in today's context, toward achieving *well-being*, and of having child participation a necessary component. This is notoriously not favorable in the different countries of South America.
6. Finally, this article ends with some thoughts on research and what is on the horizon for the future of childhoods.

This article intends to point out how children in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, non-Western communities, have had the right of participation as part of their ancestral culture without speaking it as a right or having a specific word in their language that refers to it. This may explain the accent, mainly Latin American and African, that permeates this article and why the CRC has been recognized for its contribution and to what extent it fell short on other ways. Van Beers' assertion is relevant in reminding us that to some extent children have always participated and been organized (Van Beers 2008). Therefore, we recognize that participation by children and adolescents was a reality in diverse cultural contexts before the CRC and was known by those aware of the orientation and rationale of the CRC. However, just the same, there are ancestral cultures, such as Vietnamese, that do not consider the participation of minors as part of their way of life, as Van Beers himself recalls.

### 86.4 Epistemological Premises

We consider five epistemological premises as necessary to this discussion. The first one is to try to think of childhood participation as well as childhood well-being from the

South's point of view, in the sense given to expression "the South" by the Portuguese sociologist Sousa Santos, i.e., not merely the geographic south, but the qualitative South.

I understand by epistemology of the South the pursuit of knowledge and criteria of validity of the knowledge that give visibility and credibility to the cognitive practices of classes, peoples and social groups which have been historically victimized, exploited and oppressed by global colonialism and capitalism. The South, therefore, is used here as a metaphor for the human suffering systematically caused by colonialism and capitalism (Sousa Santos 2009, p. 12).

To this we should add the effort required for the nonthinking on the part of the UN and the States on a topic of such relevance as the participation of the younger generations; *nonthinking* in the sense of doing so without giving a final thought to what emanates, to date, from agencies and institutions of the UN and which is often reproduced by the majority of the States, without much criticism, even after having incorporated into their laws the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 (hereinafter CRC or the Convention).

A second epistemological premise refers to the modern non-Western worldviews that demythologize the dominant discourse on child participation, as if it was a great innovation brought about by the CRC at the end of the twentieth century, in the systematic hermeneutics made by some authors such as Santos Pais (1997), Hart (1997), and Crowley (1999), among others. Hernandez Morales (2007) happens to be by far the most historically inaccurate when reviewing Hart's book when he says: "The concept of child participation, complex and controversial, inaugurated by the International Convention on the Rights of the Child of UNICEF, with its good decisions and contradictions, opened a new scenario for the recognition of children as citizens." He failed to say that this was true for the modern Western world (up to where historiography today has investigated) since other worldviews have provided valuable ideas on what has been called children's participation; a synthesis of them could help reach a more complex understanding of the right to it, despite the fact that the CRC is not from UNICEF but from the UN.

A third premise refers to participation as a matter of power, both inter- and intragenerational. What is at stake in the speech, or speeches, on participation is directly related to social division of power that underlies the dominant social contract between society, the State, and childhoods. The eruption of boys and girls, recognized as bearers of the right to participate, into the life of society should imply the need to consolidate democracy as a culture and as a system. Although the childhoods have been the last of a series of groups to position themselves as legitimate speakers and active participants, they begin to place the issue of the necessary range of matters such as citizenship and civil capacity in the local and international agendas.

The fourth premise concerns the paradoxes of child participation during the almost 23 years since the approval of the CRC. Paradoxes are evident among the diverse experiences that children around the world consider to be their forms of participation, in the distance between these experiences and the formal processes of institutionalizing such participation in different contexts, and in the new legislation on childhood that deals with the recognition of the right of children to participate

and organize themselves and the continuation of adulthood cultures that make child participation merely symbolic and fictional.

The fifth premise is to recognize that in the ideological and practical framework of protection as a synonym for control, dependence, and child submission to the family, school, and social adult world, one cannot speak in the strict sense of participation. Neither the doctrine of the irregular situation nor the dominant tutelary order in most countries allows a real recognition of participation for boys and girls (There is a hegemonic image of what dominant Society considers to be a "regular" or "normal" Child situation. If you do not fit to that image you would be seen as "non normal", a "non regular" or accepted Child.).

In short, the enjoyment and the exercise of the right to social and political participation for boys and girls in all that concerns them simultaneously constitutes a necessary component of the personal well-being and that of society and is a factor in transforming what until today is understood as democracy and citizenship.

## **86.5 From an Excluding Modernity**

From the contributions of modern capitalist Western countries, we note two instances in recorded history that marked deeply what Philippe Ariés called the "sentiment of childhood." This sentiment was expressed in the world wars and the ravage they caused on both military and civilian populations, including children and minors, and in the exploitation of child labor in the mines, factories, and workshops of the nascent industrial capitalism at the end of the seventeenth century, all of the nineteenth century, and the beginning of the twentieth century. We then went through the constitution of a social imaginary, with saving and compassionate sentiment toward children, who were seen exclusively as victims (Social imaginary refers to how we construct our ideas, our mind representation of something). It is a paradox that the instilled cynicism used as a defense mechanism against political ambitions for an increase in power and greed to accumulate money had no hesitation in asking at the same time, even compulsively, for the participation of children in armed conflicts, as had been seen before in servitude and labor exploitation.

### **86.5.1 An Excluding Modernity**

The history of the modern West has given us an account of how the Rights of Man, proclaimed in 1789, were reduced to simple statements of principle: when referring to citizens, women, indigenous people, and children were excluded of the real exercise of those formerly recognized rights. These persons will be the last to be taken into consideration if eventually they could begin to be recognized as citizens. This happens because to talk about participation of children directly touches the question of citizenship, the status of childhood, its civil capacity.

### 86.5.2 Protection of the Child Is Something Obvious, Accepted, and Naturalized

There are two factors that, to our understanding, have an impact on the *humanitarian* step toward *protection* of the child: the prohibition of enlistment in armed conflicts and compulsory school instead of work. This establishes the common sense that the child is an object of protection, that the nature and biology of a child defines the child as a being in need for protection. This would be the obvious conclusion that would arise to the mere act of only naming a boy, girl, and not only to protect them against violence, abuse, and exploitation, but as an ethical imperative stemming from the nature of the child (Chariot 1976, pp. 85-107).

It is evident, then, how protection becomes the supreme and only responsibility of the adult world, the State, and all the institutions of society with respect to children. The important thing is that these representations are also common sense and goes hand in hand with the ideology of the child as a vulnerable, incapable, and immature being. That is, it is an approach that becomes ethically and politically consistent, but also carries a great paradox, namely, the insignificance of children and their participation, which seems to be a condition for the achievement of the well-being of a sector of the population. Society has made progress and has reached high standards of economic life without requiring the economic, social, nor civic-political participation of children.

Childhood makes up the underworld of what has been considered since the end of the eighteenth century as *the included in the condition of excluded*, of insignificant beings, of formally declared "present absentees" in what calls the *abysmal thinking* (2009, pp. 160-169). This underworld is made up in part by women and the people who are on the other side of the line, the hidden ones. If this is the case, it is easy to understand the nonsense talk of social participation in reference to children and adolescents (referred to as CA). But here lies a contradiction, i.e., proclaim that all members of the human species are subjects of rights and then limit to an extreme their effective participation and the exercise of those rights. This contradiction is not perceived and silenced thanks to the process of ideological rationalization instilled in the social imaginaries, or either admitted to and supposedly exceeded in the fiction of their own exclusive spaces or suited to the dependent nature of the child due to his/her incapacity; what has been expressed as the "yes, but not yet." It should not surprise anyone that thinkers of the stature of Arendt (2003) argue that "children are human beings who are on the track of being one, but are not yet complete" (in Roldán 2007, p. 288). Therefore, one can say that the right to protection recognized by CA is the result of having transformed the representation in ethically imperative without fissures of the child as vulnerable per se, and of the implicit acknowledgment that society uses violent means on whom it considers not only vulnerable, but inferior and unequal. That is the reason why the basic consensus should be that a decent world for children is a world in which all children are protected (Union Interparlementaire 2004, p. 15).

### **86.5.3 Divergent Actions and Thinking Have Always Existed**

However, progress has not been the same for all contexts. There are interesting ones, for example, the recent case of the Political Constitution of Ecuador (2008), which states that anybody who is born in Ecuadorian territory is a citizen. To be recognized as a citizen implies the tacit recognition of the right to exercise citizenship, i.e., to participate in consistency with the positive regulation that has been established. However, all this discourse does not destroy the fences of modern Western world-view; that is why, from other cultural viewpoints, the same participatory language becomes unnecessary. We might also add Bolivia's recent Political Constitution and that of Venezuela in the very same sense of Ecuador's Constitution.

In sectors of the Andean communities - without having to idealize them or fall into cultural relativism - to speak of the right to participate would be simply a kind of existential pleonasm, since not to participate would be the same as not being a member of the community, nor to exist socially. The community is based on the participation of all its members according to their personal conditions. The foundation of participation does not lie in the proclamation of a law but in belonging to a community in which everyone participates in the life of the community, distinguishing between tasks, times, and orders. It is a worldview, and not something aside from it. Even chronological age is not a barrier to exercise direct or symbolic forms of participation in roles that relate to the care of the entire community, to be an elected authority and at the same time cover the ritual spaces, work in the field, forecast the weather, and prioritize agriculture. The reason for this is that child participation is based on a relationship of equivalence between the adult world and childhood. In this cultural matrix, everything points to what we know as protection, but it is called caring, cultivating, and letting others take care of and cultivate oneself. Participation is simultaneously an experiment, an exercise, and a promotion with a protective effect.

In this fabric of relations, symbols, equivalences, reciprocities, and transcendences, the real participation of CAs coincides with their protection, essentially with the permanent promotion of their full potential. It should be said with great conviction that in this ancestrally renewed experience by the community, in this way of living, the child becomes an actor of its life, the protagonist of its story, the driver of its development, the producer of its identity and personality. There is no passivity or mere receptivity of what the community raises. The child is an active part, recipient and actor, result and contributor, and cosharer and therefore in the constitution of the emotional culture of his/her family, community and country.

## **86.6 The Need for an Including Paradigm**

### **86.6.1 Participation and Its Imaginaries in the CRC**

We present the large imaginaries that have been assumed by the CRC and those inserted in the Latin American region as well as in the social movements of NATs

(Working Children and Adolescents), especially in Africa and Asia (The CRC as any text or discourse expresses an understanding about anything. In other words, CRC has a mind representation of what is to be a Child or what is participation. Sociologists use to call "imaginaries" or "social imaginary" this phenomenon).

- (a) The Convention gave, in a rather shy way in our opinion, the right to a chopped opinion (CRC) expressed in article 12, in addition, to the constraints that it added (the chronological age and the level of maturity). However, after strong pressure the CRC included the right to what was then recognized as the minimum form of existence of the child before others: the opinion. An additional step was taken when it pointed out that those who administer justice must take into account this opinion. However, the CRC does not necessarily mean "give an account of what was done with the child's opinion" since in each case it leaves open the discretion of the adult facing the social burden that such an opinion can have. This is where we see the greatest effect of the Western thought on the CRC.

In other cultures, the opinion of the child is also part of the voice that is regarded like the others in the life of the community and it depends neither on the chronological age nor on what the CRC called the degree of maturity reached. Thus, the maturity criterion is neither individualized nor isolated from those of the community as a whole, the family, or the collective ethnic opinion. It does not run the risk of becoming a crude fiction as in modern and Western cultures, although we must consider that the opinion heard and taken into account is not immune to error.

- (b) In the special session in favor of childhood of the United Nations General Assembly in October 2002, the tensions between the proposals on the right of important sectors of society to participation and child organizations themselves were made evident. However, to a certain extent, the adultist criterion was imposed. Indeed, the final document issued from that session states that we must consider not only the rights of the child, but recuperate the rights of the parents over their children, taking into account the "chaos" of the family and the adolescent world. From infancy up to puberty, children would continue to live under the mandates of the family in particular and adults in general.

The dominant imaginary of the special session brought back the idea of submission and dependence, and the main responsibility of parents and caregivers. This position not only reveals the belief in the loss of authority of the adult world to that of the new generation, but is a sort of return to the resource of discipline and control by adults. None of this is foreign to the widespread trend of the criminalization of adolescence by reducing the criminal age and severe legislation whose main function is corrective and severe punishment for breaking the law rather than education and the elimination of the causes of crime. After nearly 9 years this trend is still in force in the Latin American region and in particular in the large cities in Africa due to migration.

- (c) The Social Movements of Children and Adolescents in the Latin American Region, as well as organizations of civil society in solidarity with the efforts of these movements promote other representations of childhood. Thirteen years



before the CRC, some Peruvian children organizations made from of their participation a specific form of self-recognition and obtained recognition from others that they were the protagonists of their own history and participants in their communities and country. The organizing process has been slow and uneven but real and sustained over time and has taken place in a similar way in different countries of the Andean region, i.e., Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia, supported by Terre des Hommes from Germany together with other international organizations such as Save the Children from Sweden and Save the Children Canada recently. The concept was framed under a view that granted the discourse and participatory practice of children, a new conceptual horizon. The discourses on child protagonist have shown the constitution of an epistemological break which is expressed in the hermeneutics of the CRC as elaborated on by these organizations and that go well beyond the CRC. Today, this approach is a conceptual heritage and has an undeniable impact on the social practices of the international organizations of children. The Latin American and Caribbean Movement of Working Children and Adolescents (MOLACNA Ts is the Spanish acronym) has become known on the Latin American and Caribbean level. With their own nuances, children's movements in Asia and Africa are constituted with the same perspective, i.e., the African MEJT and Bhima Sangha and Butterflies in India.

Without a doubt, all of this gets tired out even when the indigenous experience is incorporated, i.e., to enrich and develop what has been called the proposal on protagonist participation from the non-Western worldview, which communities such as the Andean and the Amazonian are called on to pose. In this regard, the proposal itself from the protagonist paradigm is open to re-elaboration, not only in reference to language, but to meaning and content. The reason is that popular social movements still have much to contribute to these efforts. An example is the secondary student movement in 2006 in Chile, called "the rebellion of the penguins," that had about 100,000 students at its peak and which was followed by a strike of nearly 600,000 students (see details in Rivero 2008). It is in this framework that the experiences of many organizations of CA are inscribed and it is in the light of the specific indicators of the concrete development of the way to participate that one has an idea of the progress achieved in projects supported by some organizations of the countries of the South.

- (d) Twenty-one years after the approval of the CRC, the follow-up committee issued for reflection an important document on article 12 as a General Remark/Comment: the representation of childhood as citizen population, as social actor, as participant in the life of the people. Although it starts with the underlying framework of the text of the CRC, it assumes the responsibility of unraveling and explaining the possible implications of the original text and overcomes a certain way of understanding the restrictions posed by the text itself. This was a delicate task, but a legitimate and daring one that an agency of the UN itself has achieved by gathering the best of the progress made regarding the concrete participation of children throughout the almost two decades and given it its own interpretation under its strict responsibility.

That does not mean that the General Comment of the Committee does not contain contradictions and questionable claims about some issues, also treated in its Comment.

We can say that for the Committee the outstanding representation of the child is that of a first class citizen, coresponsible in all that affects him/her, able not only to give his/her opinion but to demand to know social weight what his/her opinion was given in the decision-making and why. The Commentary addresses issues such as age as well as maturity, which were always controversial issues, but the formal text of the CRC is anchored to an adultist culture that aims to control and to a view of the gradual exercise of the rights that borders on the same restriction.

It is for this reason that the principle of *evolving capacities* must be carefully understood so that it does not become some sort of social moratorium with regard to the right to participation based on psychological reasons that should not be a universal dogma. An interesting thought in this regard is contained in the contributions of Lansdown (2005, 88 pp).

It should be noted that the CRC, despite its process of elaboration, reflects the way of understanding a sector of humanity regarding children. This in itself does not disqualify it, but opens questions with regard to the interests that underlie such agreements, consensus, and even consents. At the same time, in many places of the world there are experiences with different ways of understanding children and their capacity or aspiration to participate in what affects their community, their collectivism. By way of example, we point out that 13 years before the CRC, organizations and movements of children and adolescents had already emerged, inspired by the principles that represent a real epistemological break with the global guidance contained in the CRC. These examples include MANTHOC in Peru since 1976, part of MNMMR of Brazil since 1985, and the Movement Chicos del Pueblo of Argentina at the end of the 1980s. A few years later, African voices were heard clamoring for the participation of children as an expression of their ancestral cultures, especially with the MEJT (2000, 2003) that emerged in Senegal and spread to about 17 other African countries. However, it must be acknowledged that while the CRC was not inspired by non-Western worldviews, which in this sense affects its universality, the CRC has opened doors that cannot be closed again. As Recknagel (2002, 2009, pp. 57-67) has very rightly pointed out, all cultural and historical products do not escape this contingency, not even the CRC. Some of the World Congresses on the Rights of Children and Adolescents, such as the one in Lima in 2005, were really symbolic expressions of the participation of children and the exercise of their coprotagonism together with adults. Unfortunately for the next World Congresses held at Barcelona, in Puerto Rico and recently in Argentina we have assisted to a decline of real Children protagonist participation in those events. Networks, Children's Parliaments, and Participative Budgets (in the cases of Ecuador, Brazil, Peru) were presented. There are also publications that have monitored 10-15 years of accompaniment of the processes of participation of groups in Latin America. These have allowed the evaluation and systematization of the meaning of the struggle of emergence of a new culture of participation in the midst of representative democracies with a weak participatory character. These experiences

become counterhegemonic active nuclei, which have been called active minorities by Moscovici [see Céspedes (1998), Cussiánovich and Bazán (2009), and Martínez (2009) for discussion on the subject applied to childhood movements].

From these experiences the following idea has been coined: "Further back from the CRC, no! but past beyond the CRC, why not?" This reflects an assessment of the CRC and at the same time a criterion for its practical application and for its translation into specific realities and contexts. Therefore, it is the spirit and the potential of the CRC what must be defended rather than its articles verbatim (Bácares, C, 2012, *passim*).

In the period after the release of the CRC we have witnessed an explosion of initiatives in line with the participation of children in their societies, as citizens of the world. This dynamism is a call to question democracy and demand its refoundation. It would be sufficient to collect the statements, assumptions of public opinion, allegations, and pronouncements that organizations (at least in Latin America, Asia, and Africa) have put forth in the past 30 years. There is a clamor to let others feel that the right to participation is not a gift or a concession but a right to conquer in real life. But also there is the belief that beyond the spirit of the CRC there are some steps ahead. It is under this general framework that various trends on participation that have been raised in relation to this right can be best understood.

Under the framework of the Convention, different approaches have been worked out, which we can classify into five sections. Perhaps only the approach that was made almost 20 years before the Convention is the one that takes more into account the nonexclusive issue of Western worldviews and which also represents a real break with the dominant paradigms of childhood and, partially, with the Convention.

### **86.6.2 The Need for Another Paradigm on Childhood**

In this slow but successful process, there is a question of dignity of groups such as childhood, historically considered to be inactive for the well-being of all of society and, in particular, for the public domain. A nonproductive population as it was described. The participation of boys and girls in all that concerns them is what constitutes today an inescapable criticism of hegemonic cultures of childhood and adulthood. We refer to both, those that remain in the private-domestic and intrafamilial scheme and those that have performed a slight extension of domesticity into certain spaces of what is social-public, but without breaking with the ideology of the dependent and subordinate nature of childhood in the context of adultist society.

### **86.6.3 Child Well-Being and Rights Approach, Capability Approach, and Participation Approach**

Studies that have endorsed the approach of *capabilities*, first posed by Amartya Sen, in relation to children, and in particular to those considered *out of place*

(street, worker, offenders, at-risk, or vulnerable), are rare. Rather, what has already been incorporated as a principle is the focus on rights. Regarding the participatory approach, this begins to be a component of working methodologies and even in the different phases of the processes of research.

The articulation of these three approaches (capabilities, participation, and rights approach) makes up a rapprochement in relation to the well-being of children as a concept and a reality in their everyday life. While Sen coined the term *capability approach*, which refers to his concept of development, well-being is a concrete and multidimensional expression of development understood as liberty, or welfare, or what was called "flourishing," "in order to indicate the 'multiple dimensions realization' of a person. In the case of children, 'flourishing' implies their autorealization in the capabilities dimensions, first as children and later as adults" (Biggeri and Anich 2009, p. 75, quoting Nussbaum). For (ibid.) "the capability approach can be very useful, both as framework of thought and normative tool, in analyzing children's well-being and poverty and in individuating social policies since it incorporates a non-market dimension and takes into consideration her/his freedom to achieve something, i.e., the process of freedom." Nevertheless, a participatory approach implies the mandate that participation is a right and at the very same time is a transversal criteria in the daily life of Children at their family, school, their community and in every thing concerning them.

### **86.6.4 Participation: Much More Than Taking Part**

When we state that children have the right to participate in what concerns them and in all contexts (family, school, community), we are understanding participation as a call to rethink democracy as a worldview, as a way of seeing the world, of seeing oneself in the world and playing an active role in it. In CIDA we find that

... children make up 50 % of the population in many countries of the world and their views and capacities can make a crucial contribution to the development of their societies. In sharing their knowledge, insights and creativity, young people are also assisted in developing important life skills such as problem analysis, democratic decision-making, developing feasible solutions and seeing these through. The participation of girls and boys in decision-making about their lives represents a broadening and deepening of how we practice democracy (CIDA 2011, p. 2). Visited on November 2011.

This is why the distinction between participation and citizenship becomes necessary, since the claim of children as citizens refers to the recognized status, whose exercise is made concrete through participation, as expressed by Kocherthaler (2007, pp. 43-66).

In this sense, it is pertinent to note that, thanks to the experiences of the social movements of CA in the Latin American region, it is becoming increasingly clearer that participation is not an end in itself and that one of the greatest risks is to idealize it as an element that magically achieves a transformation of childhood cultures and

of the dominant intergenerational relationships in society and in the bureaucratic culture of the official apparatus. This may be the origin of the multiplication of purely fictional forms of participation that have arisen in the past 15-20 years, not only in the Latin American region but at the international level.

Institutionalizing the participation of children, for which there are frequent calls, would not necessarily guarantee that the view expressed by the organization of CA could find the relevant channels to become a reality in the whole process of decision-making and control over the destination that it has deserved, by policy-makers.

### **86.6.5 Participation of Individuals and Their Organizations**

It is not uncommon to make the point that participation is a right of every child, emphasizing the shade rather individualized of the subjects holders of rights. That is why the representativeness of the organizations and movements of children is questioned with respect to that of unorganized children. It is precisely this participation of the social movements and organizations with stability and trajectory that creates difficulties so that adult society may understand the real character and strength of what direct participation of CA organizations means for the systems of delegated democracies, with little participation and null deliberation. It is in this context that participation, particularly the organized and representative kind, must be understood as being in the best interest of CA. For now, it seems inevitable that discourses on participation of CA are perceived as a certain threat to persons and established structures. The threat is usually accompanied by doubts, reticence, and even opposition. It can also give rise to conciliatory formulas that are like a recovery of the participation of CA within the preestablished patterns that are modernized but do not change [see the reflections with regard to this made by Sánchez Parga (2004, pp. 275-292)].

### **86.6.6 Participation as a Right, Refers to Dignity**

The idea of participation that we refer to here is the dignity and independent approach. It is, therefore, a rights approach, because rights are founded on human dignity, "and dignity is a fundamental need," which points out the permanent emancipation [in this case to that of CA in Schwartz, quoted in Zimmelman (2007, p. 18)]. During the last 35 years, CA organizations have allowed us to watch, analyze, and assess the experience of promoting the participation of children and adolescents with this emancipating and dignifying perspective.

One of the substantive elements in the struggle of people for their recognition as bearers of inalienable rights is their dignity, a concrete sign of their need for emancipation, liberating themselves of all that denies them their dignity while making them dependent and denying them their own autonomy and identity. This is the value that underlies each right, particularly in the right to be a part of society

and to feel like an active member, which in certain cultures and in official speeches is known as the right to participate.

We think it is necessary to focus on dignity as the axis around which one's own identity is built and defended and the autonomous personality is constituted and developed, from where the freedom of thought, conscience, and opinion is affirmed and placed as a condition for democratic understanding, and from where one experiences inclusion and fights against all discrimination. However, dignity is not something abstract but also dynamic since it is a struggle to develop it in the historic context in which there are elements that favor and recognize it at the same time trample over it and deny it. For this reason, dignity is part and parcel of any emancipator struggle. It is in the world of those who the dominant power groups regard as having a devalued dignity and are almost nonexistent and socially and politically insignificant, that it is relevant to recall that in the Western context and in international organizations is known as "human rights" has in the dignity of people their real content. Among the groups that have always been denied their dignity, we find *childhoods* together with indigenous people, women, and all those who have experienced unprecedented forms of exclusion and discrimination.

All of this constitutes a struggle for their dignity, although success on many occasions has been relative. The death throes, i.e., the energetic affirmation of social and political existence as citizens, make them grow in dignity beyond the achievements that they have been able to reach. An enthusiastic example is that of CA of Bolivia on the occasion of the Constituent (Assembly for the new Bolivia's Political Constitution.). Dignity is not measured with concrete and circumstantial results from the experiences of participation, but with the symbolic strength, deployed mood, and awareness and conviction of the fairness of the cause defended. Dignity is not interchangeable with decency: to be worthy is not only to be decent, to work with dignity and for dignity, it is not only to aspire to a decent job such as what today many pretend to reduce the historic struggle of millions and millions of workers in the discourse of international agencies. Dignity is still the horizon of humanization in which the discourse of human rights takes on all its emancipator force.

However, we must recognize that "child participation in all that concerns him/her" is another factor that now happens to be a topic. The practical hermeneutics of the field that "concerns them" because of their condition as children remains in the hands of those who decide for them or who are responsible for feeding the imagination, sentiments, and opinion that have generated several dominant cultures of children and which are precisely, to say the least, reluctant to honestly recognize this right and its exercise.

### **86.6.7 Learning How to Participate in a Society That Does Not Tend to Promote It**

The discourse on child participation not only requires the deconstruction of the traditional social representations of childhood, but the construction of those who

will recover it as a social and political actor. This is what several years ago both Qvortrup (1991, pp. 39-55) and Ennew (1991, pp. 57-71) pointed out: "the child as a competent political, economic and social subject." Therefore, to avoid the risk of stalling out as an ideological discourse, the reorientation of the sense of child participation faces, in our view, two fundamental challenges: the need for institutionalization of such participation and, at its level, the achievement of political competition, i.e., to form its own critical, flexible, complex, and always open criteria. As Choudhury points out,

The powerlessness of children is not only because of their zero-sum power relation with adults, children's vulnerability and lack of access is determined more by class and social status. In the South Asian society, the children from higher caste, from richer families, enjoy more power than the adults from lower caste or poorer background. Inherently, the major poor children find difficult to come forward and to express their true consciousness within the existing social relationship, partly because their capacity has evolved not according to the standard set by the society, and thus lose out. . . ; discussion . . . suggests that to promote their socio-economic conditions, the alternative way for the marginalised children is to find their own survival strategy. It is not mere participation, but mobilization, that can bring positive changes in their lives (Choudhury 2003, pp. 36-37).

### **86.6.8 1989: Washington Consensus, CRC:Participation and Well-Being**

The paradigmatic transition refers to major social, political, economic, and cultural changes, i.e., significant concurrent modifications in the sentiments, subjectivities, ideas, representations, and the way of understanding social and personal life. In reality, it deals with recognizing that institutional social imaginaries have been establishing carriers not so much of criticism of the previous ones, but an expression of the urgent need to have creative and innovative referents, although this is still not extensively concrete and is an embryonic objective reality.

The exhaustion of the model of constitutional democracies in many of our countries, the widening of the margins of exclusion, and not only because of the recent economic crisis, what is related to dialogue as a condition of the rule of law, and the ephemeral weight of the decision-making of the citizens influencing the progress of the people make the purported relevance of discourse on participation hardly credible, particularly when minors are at stake. And all of this takes place in the midst of the deterioration and the end of the so-called Welfare State (Castel, R, 2009).

The content of the articles of the CRC did not escape these hesitant forms of understanding the heritage of Western modernity and it clearly shows that the concern for children was not "the" main concern of those who for 10 years dealt with the consensus that implied such a Convention. In fact, childhood rights were subordinated to the maintenance of a fragile balance between the characteristic tensions between East and West that characterized the post-war era up to the symbolic fall of the Berlin Wall.

Perhaps in this context it can be better understood why the CRC does not state directly that the right to participate is a political right of CA. In fact, the only time that the right of child participation appears explicitly is in article 31 (right to leisure, recreation, and game) and it refers to what is known in the domestic, private world as the *playpen* of childhood: what is cultural and playful. Judith Ennew rightly recalls that civil rights and freedoms have been reduced to the so-called right to participation stated in articles 12, 13, 14, 15, and 23 (usually cited). These rights are affected by two factors: the chronological age and the degree of maturity, which are two mechanisms that adults use to regulate the sense and social weight of participation specified in the opinion. We find that we are facing participation that is monitored, conditioned, and accompanied by the opinion of adults.

It has been stated that in order to understand the right to participation in the CRC, one must overcome a literal reading of it; this literal approach would be disarticulated from systematic dynamics for its hermeneutics [see the suggestive elaborations of Santos Pais (1997)], a kind of basis in verses and periscopes characteristic of the fundamentalist and segmented views. It seems that in the period after CRC, a certain legal paternalism has not been possible to overcome. This concept was developed in Garzón Valdés (2006, pp. 287-308), who expressed a form of authoritarianism in future generations, especially when they do not participate in the elaboration of the rules that afterward will govern their behavior in society.

### 86.6.9 Participation of CA in the Geneva Committee Thought

It is necessary to consider what Baratta (1998) says with regard to the reading of article 12 of the CRC and how, years later, the same Geneva Committee on the rights of the child produced a General Comment to that article. The framework of the general comment of the Committee on article 12 of the Convention gives clues that we endorse:

1. Dismantle the legal, political, economic, social, and cultural barriers that currently impede the access of children to participation in decision-making (No. 75).
2. Children should be consulted about the elaboration of legislation and policies relating to juvenile justice and involved in the formulation, development, and implementation of related plans and programmes (No. 62).
3. Children also have the right to be provided with clear feedback on how their participation has influenced any result [No. 73 (VIII)].
4. The Committee (...) recognising the growing number of organisations led by children and young people throughout the world, welcomes their formation as a vehicle to promote the right to participation. It encourages States Parties to support and encourage initiatives led by children and their organisations, as well as considers the introduction of legislation or regulations that enable and support children so that they may form their own organisations. Organised groups of children and young people must have participatory democratic structures [No. 29 (V)].



5. The Committee emphasizes that it does not impose age limit to the right to participation and discourages the States Parties to introduce age limits in the law and practice that restrict the right of the child to participation (No. 9).
6. The free expression of the views of children requires a commitment with a cultural change, in which the adults begin to adopt attitudes that recognise the importance of listening and respecting children (No. 10).
7. Move from the focus of consultations, in events, conferences ... to the systematic inclusion of the participation of children in policy-making. Mechanisms should be made to institutionalise the participation of children in all levels of relevant decision-making of the Government, including legislative reform, policy-making. [No. 29 (V)].
8. The Committee recommends the States Parties to "actively involve children in the regular process of review of the Convention" (No. 29, viii).
9. The Committee welcomes the movements in various countries to reduce the voting age in national and community elections, as a sign of acceptance of the evolution of the faculties of children (No. 29, iv).

We believe that here there is a relationship between well-being, the best interests of the child, and participation. The CRC states unequivocally the right of every child to survival. The Convention indicates that it is the States' responsibility to make it possible for children to achieve well-being. In other words, it seems that underlying the text is what has been called well-being. It contains a certain spirit of welfarism that refers to the attainment of life quality, happiness, satisfaction, emotional well-being, mental well-being, and subjective well-being. Also, article 27, 1 of the CRC that reminds us that the "States Parties recognise the right of all children to an adequate level for his/her physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development." For us the concept of well-being expresses fully the letter and spirit of this article. In a conceptual matrix that favors the individual as the owner of rights, well-being could be understood as what is good for an individual. However, recognizing that the well-being of one person has the risk of being individualistic, utilitarian, and even hedonistic when it is related to the well-being of others, we face an ethical and moral issues, i.e., something that concerns the interests of others. In this sense the "scientific understanding of well-being and applying the new knowledge to helping people and institutions develop their potential well-being refers to positive and sustainable characteristics which enable individuals and organizations to thrive and flourish" (University of Cambridge 2011), Therefore, it is necessary to relate well-being to what the CRC indicates in its article 3, the Best Interest of the Child and participation.

Experience shows that when children do not feel that they are participants, or that they are not allowed to participate as they would want to, they feel excluded. On the other hand, when they experience being taken into account, listened to, and valued for their participation, they feel considered. Thus, participation is a component of what we are consider well-being. It is not far from what adults experience when feeling well. It not only deals with feeling well, it also involves subjective dimensions, attitudes, and motivations and provides defenses against the vicissitudes of life and its environment. In this understanding we consider

participation must be regarded as a main axis of social public politics of subjectivity (Tedesco, J C, 2012; Martuccelli, D, 2011).

On the other hand, it is useless to say that "ali that about" participation has become a kind of *passe par tour*, a sort of hook or crutch appended to speeches, in the submission of projects for approval, in methodologies of work, and so on. This extension of the category to diverse social practices at the same time has caused a certain depletion of its significance and its trivialization affects its innovative strength. Speeches about child participation do not break from this phenomenon of inflation-devaluation of the appeals to participate. However, the challenge that needs to be answered is empowerment of participation and the processes involved, and to recover, in the case of childhood, its transforming potentiality of intergenerational relationships and its symbolic force in the redefinition of democracy.

Something similar happens with the discourse on citizenship, which in the past 20 years has claimed certain hegemony among different professionals in the broad universe of the social sciences (i.e., sociology, psychology, education, social work, communication, human rights workers, nongovernmental organizations). Then it appears to be linked to the issue of civil society, surveillance, rights, participation, citizen watch, and education. Certainly the topic is not new; its eventual novelty is put to rest when one speaks of illiterate women and men as citizens and of indigenous people and citizen rights. However, the subject becomes more controversial! when one says that children are citizens. One can refer to the relationship between citizenship and work (Gentili and Frigotto 2001) in relationship to childhood. Ennew (2000) wrote:

Children's resistance is not participation? There seems to be a distinction between participation, at whatever level, which is offered and legitimated by adults, and the resistance that children put up spontaneously (either as individuals or group), which is not recognized as legitimate by adults. At the international level, one might compare the adult sponsored Global March Against Child Labour in 1988 and children in organizations of child workers who refused to take part. The former called for the elimination of child work, the latter demanded the right to work with dignity. One wonders what will be the result of the World Bank's current plan to harness children participation in the light to eliminate child work. What will happen to children who do not want to take part? Will they be silenced by not being included in World Bank plans and publicity, thus effectively denying them the right to freedom of expression? ... The difference between adult recognized participation and other kinds of participation can often be obscured by other factors and considerations .... The grounds for excluding children from franchise (and quoting B. Franklin): "The exclusion of children from full political status is an enigma which democratic politics should not allow ... what is at stake here is not simply the denial of citizen rights but the right to be citizen." (2000, pp. 18-19, 21)

### **86.6.10 Participation Favors Citizen Awareness of CA**

Excluding globalization, it is important to state clearly what participation one can talk about, what citizenship may require, taking into account that children are viewed as nonproductive but as objects of investment in the best cases, when not viewed as

expenditure. In practice, participation and citizenship are inconsistent with social exclusion, poverty, and reduction of the space of survival. Is it realistic to speak of citizen participation and democracy considering the current conditions of marginalization of the majority of boys and girls of the South countries? We believe that we should, precisely from the denial that one must claim *the negation of the negation*, i.e., affirming the right to dignity in the name of human condition, the foundation of the universality of human rights. Besides, acting from the margins emphasizes that citizenship refers directly to social justice and the denied communitarian membership and for Kymlicka and Norman (1997) that is the core of political philosophy.

The views presented here try to remember the long and unfinished journey of children (of each child per se and of the different generations that inhabit it) in the conquest for their rights and their efforts to show that boys and girls, while being recognized as subjects of rights, they are competent beings, social, political, and economic actors, and citizens, a factor of transformation of society as a whole, just as is the case with women and indigenous people. Specifically, this deals with the right to participation on which the possibility of self-recognition as citizen members of a democratic society depends, in its organization and functioning, and the spirit that animates its social relations at all levels.

We believe that an essential task of the new generations is to reach the core of the advancements, debates, and searches on democracy, participation, and citizenship that are taking place. We will point out some of these thematic axes and reflections that were already presented by Cussianovich and Bazán (2009):

- (a) Placing the right to participate in the coordinates that distinguish them from the discussion, assuring that they are not intrinsically complementary.
- (b) Reasonably questioning why children and adolescents are out of the "democratic political market" as expressed by Hernández (2005, p. 13).
- (c) Helping to defetish participation, converted into an easy populist appeal, with little reformism and supposedly magical.
- (d) Learning to develop the deliberative component of democratic participation, as noted by Cebrián (2005, p. 10).
- (e) Recognizing the need to overcome the paradoxes that Blondiaux and Sintomer (op. cit., pp. 104-112) indicated: deliberate-decide; participate-decide; delegate-master; claim of citizen condition and remoteness of the political system; civil citizen will and closed political system; public opinion and ignorance of the divergent contributions to common sense; intention to reach consensus on and mutual disagreements; representation and ghetto; dialogue and legitimacy; dialogue and rule of law; participation and legitimacy; what is important is not the election but the formation of public opinion (ibid. p. 101); autonomy, own thought and deliberation. Etyrnology refers to "of"/"liberation," about how we make progress in freedom, in autonomy, in shaking ourselves out of what makes us dependent, submissive, and dominated. Although respect is a necessary reason for democracy, it is not a sufficient reason. We believe that respect is the inescapable passage, but the democratic project does not have respect as its ultimate goal; rather, it is development of the human condition, even welfare (Sennett 2005), that may be an indicator among others.

The big question that arises then is what has to be done so that the advances that children and adolescents are realizing as social subjects and actors can be recognized and enriched by what has been called "the new spirit of public action" (Blondiaux and Sintomer p. 105).

Future generations will be able to produce a drastic change in their reflection (way of thinking or considering, or understanding life) with greater skill and speed, change what they understand about decision-making and do so with others, discuss without limits that infringe on the general welfare and collective security, and have lifelong learning experiences with tolerance, negotiation, dialogue, and overcoming prejudice. This will ultimately build a new experience and a democratic culture, different from the one inherited from the generations that preceded them. We are referring to what has been called teledemocracy. From there you can enter more easily the paradoxes that have been discussed previously. Those who cannot vote because they are minors can find new ways to feel that they have an opinion and that they are voting, although their opinion is not considered officially. This kind of voting outside the polis, simultaneously and parallel, could be piquing the imagination and adding pressure to rethink the system of delegate or representative democracy, processes that at some point can be put into social movements by the participation of the until now minor nonvoters. Cebrián (2005, p. 4) calls it "telernatic deliberative democracy: a test of political participation." This realistically can even be a point of balance in the inevitable tension between representative democracy and deliberative democracy. As Sampedro states, as quoted by Cebrián (2005, p. 6): there is a clash between this *unattainable* utopia, that of direct democracy, and "pessimistic realism of representative democracy." In the face of this conflict, Sampedro will claim the positive utopía of deliberative democracy, where the ideals of collective participation and decision, are known to always be unfinished. Ángel Valencia concludes that whether we should call the democratic ideal of the future "participatory democracy" has to undergo a new thinking on the concept of democracy and the development of imaginative procedures that, helped by new technologies, will help complement "representative democracy" which we have quoted from Cebrián (2005, p. 10).

#### Theoretical approaches to children's participation

Child protagonist (since the 1970s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ideological, educational, and ethical-political base</li> <li>Social acting and construction of identity ("protagonist personality")</li> <li>Citizen and power exercise in coherence with own culture</li> <li>Linked to child organizations (especially working boys, girls, and adolescents, urban and rural)</li> </ul>
International convention (1989)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subject of rights (to express one's opinion, have access to information, freedom of thought, association, etc.)</li> <li>Degree of maturity and development (age)</li> <li>Best Interest of the Child</li> </ul>

(continued)

## Theoretical approaches to children's participation

Participation ladder (Hart 1992)	More related to specific projects Status of citizenship Process and means to build democracy From predefined (by adults) to decision-making (by children)
Theory of precitizenship (García and Mico 1997)	Philosophical, moral, and legal bases Citizen potential (rights moratorium) Socialization and previous time for political empowerment Moral training (stages of Kohlberg) and transition to autonomy (autonomous morality of Piaget)
Facilitating right (Crowley 1998)	Civil and political nature An end in itself (ultimate aim) Facilitating right allows the achievement of other goals [intermediate aim?] Covers all matters and areas

Source: Castro (2009, p. 14)

## 86.7 Participation from the Paradigm of the Promotion of Protagonism

The category "protagonism" remains an unanswered question due to the social theory that underlies the discourse on protagonism. There should be a more demanding analysis as the basis for the type of political culture from which protagonism originates and is presupposed today. One can say that the quest to settle the distances between thought and reality in relation to protagonism has started, because thinking and reality reinforce each other. We must assume that we are facing unmet conceptual needs and that the issue of childhood becomes an academic agenda of importance, as Foucault indicates when he says:

The first issue to be reviewed is the one I would call the conceptual needs, which means that the conceptualisation should not be founded on a theory of the object, since the conceptualised object is not the only criterion for a good conceptualisation. We should bear in mind the historic conditions that motivate our conceptualisation. A historic conscience of our present circumstances is necessary (Foucault 1996, p. 2).

The concept of childhood is where many of the great changes have taken place. These have occurred during the past four decades in symbolism and semantics. This reality was read from where it was raised (first as intuition, then as a hypothesis), since from the world of working children and adolescents an epistemological emancipator point of view was offered, not only for NATs (Working Children and Adolescents) or specifically for childhood, but for society as a whole. The epistemology of childhood is closely tied to its relationship with history. It is in this relationship that protagonism, due to its emancipator potential of subjectivities and also of theoretical approaches and debates, will continue to be functional to

postponing childhood for the Latin American Region with regard to citizenship and bearers of rights that should be respected. In any case, with respect to protagonism, we endorse what George Luckas calls the "theory of the point of view" and what Gerschenkron calls the "relative advantage of backwardness" in matters of an epistemology of childhood from our particular situation (both cited by Fuller 2000, p. 52).

We wish to point out that the discourse on protagonism as a matrix hypothesis for the rethinking of childhood has its first steps in the South and thereby Nussbaum's warnings (2001, pp. 91-92) made when he wrote that "in practice it is still problematic to use concepts that are created in a culture to describe and define realities of another culture and still more when the first has been colonised and oppressed by the second one" do not apply.

What has been produced in Latin America on protagonism of childhood and youth is still a production that we would no doubt call incipient and of an adductive nature, namely, inferential, hypothetical, and opened. Perhaps this is why it is appropriate to be vigilant about the inevitable attempts to co-opt the terms from different ideological matrices. Therefore, Iguñiz (1999) rightly points out that:

Perhaps no society can reproduce itself without offering some type of protagonism to their majorities. For this reason, not so surprisingly, the claim for popular protagonists has recently been hoisted from very diverse ideological quarries. This can remind us that the debate between proposals is always between offers of protagonism and not between approaches that affirm or deny it (...). Protagonism is fundamental to qualify a social process as liberator.

### 86.7.1 Need for Redefining the Thinking

The new matrix from the critical, complex, postcolonial, postabysmal thought favors a deeper understanding of what it means to recognize that children have the right to participate in that which concerns them. Postabysmal thought involves the recovery of the skills, knowledge, and traditions and favors its encounters with other knowledge and skills. It is not just the notion of people left aside; the postabysmal thought is linked to *intertransculturality* about which Padhila (2009, p. 23) writes. Participation of children in the culture of the native American people does not need to be affirmed as a right because, as already mentioned, it has been an inherent experience in their cultures.

Participation is an ambiguous, lax, and hybrid concept that needs a qualifier to reduce its ambiguity. It is not enough to call it active, proactive, integral, conscious, effective, or real. For nearly four decades the term protagonism has been used in the South, where it was coined, precisely in order to distinguish it from the official speeches that considered participation as populist and distinctive of the dictatorial political regimes in the region at that time Ames (1990). The etymological richness of the concept of protagonism (with respect to power, dignity, initiative, excellence, solidarity, encounter, and agony as in the ability to struggle for life) at that time allowed us to begin talking about protagonist participation. None of this guarantees

that any concept may not see its original sense transformed because this is the fate of language. Meanwhile, the participation that guides someone to go on becoming a subject of his/her own life, an actor in his/her own history, can give that person a historic and transcendent sense that finds in the protagonist paradigm its clearest expression.

### **86.7.2 The Inhibition of Well-Being Involves the Complexity of Flourishing**

For over 5 years now the CA themselves decided to talk about coprotagonism: a concept that facilitates intergenerational relationships and therefore well-being; a way to establish a sense of integration, of coparticipation within the family, school, and social sphere from the view of CA; a way of respecting diversity without falling into a naive egalitarianism; a way to include those who have been excluded for so long.

Another element that is part of the stock of the paradigm of the growing organizations of CA is to articulate and think of its action from the viewpoint of promotion rather than protection; even the last version of the CRC mentions *integral protection*. That is the axis of the promotion as an approach that allows reformulating protection and participation, including provision. What this means is that through them, the CA start being subjects of their own lives.

Therefore, it is of vital importance to consider the impact that the exercise of the right to participation produces in the subjective world of the child, and by contrast, we can guess the havoc in the spiritual life of all boys and girls that occurs when they are denied participation in that which they consider concerns them. The development of the subjective power of each person is an expression of the power needed to deal with other forms of power and aims at his/her social, cultural, political, and affective exclusion.

To a great degree, the difficulties that we encounter when trying to interact positively with others are due to ongoing abuse in our personal affective, emotional, and subjective lives. Abuse also means not to count on opportunities and conditions to deal with it. The organization as a place for children to participate in a climate of affection, confidence, and joy makes the exercise of participation a joyful experience of personal and collective growth. However, this climate or microclimate of the relationship of the boy or girl with the adult who accompanies him/her is not enough. That integration must be a tangible and symbolic expression of the child's social "integration," of his/her real articulation as a child to the best of society or societies in which the child unfolds his/her life: family, school, neighborhood, workplace.

However, we consider reasonable the observations of Bourdillon with respect to how the question of participation of children is seen from the South, in particular, that of the NATs movements. In the postulates of Liebel (2006) on which Bourdillon (2012) comments, a significant number of scholars and collaborators of such movements feel equally concerned. Three main points are included in the relevant observations of Bourdillon:

- (a) In the universe of children, we find limits to their participation due to their knowledge, to their view that sprouts from their experience (which some tend to generalize), and to their limited comprehension of the world, both reduced by and often limited to what they learn from adults.
- (b) Failure to address the limits of participation in decision-making; some authors claim that children do not have the absolute right to participation and that the best decisions are made by the adults, keeping in spirit the interests and opinion of boys and girls (Lieten et al. 2005).
- (e) There is no unanimity among the NATs, because while some claim a child has the right to work, others advocate the abolition of work for those under the minimum age, and in addition, for some, prostitution is a crime and for others it is the best choice for subsistence.

In other words, there is no consensus regarding the worst forms. What is most important about all this is not to idealize the right to participation as a magic formula, with the nuances and differences of how the same boys and girls will go on endorsing this right and its exercise in various sociopolitical and cultural contexts. However, it should be remembered that Liebel (1994) refers to the NATs of the social movements in Latin America, and there things are not exactly as Bourdillon described since he does not distinguish between the organized and the great mass of NATs; there are very different and even contradictory perceptions.

An issue that also deserves to be noted is that participation often evokes the feeling of being part of something that is already underway or established. In the first place, participation refers to the own initiative, the capacity to imagine, and to creativity. It is in this field in which children develop with greater continuity that which has been recognized as participation. It is from this perspective that age should not be an insurmountable difficulty with respect to participation; it is not restricted to what the CRC points out in article 31: free participation in cultural life and arts.

One might ask whether the role is only an ideology or a cultural transformation. It is not uncommon that some of the speeches or texts on protagonism have been thought (particularly when it refers to children) to introduce a new ideology that would end up disrespecting the processes of development of each child and almost be a way of making adults out of children, giving them autonomies they do not possess, the capacity to have their own criteria when he/she is in formation, and maturity that he/she cannot end up showing. The evidence for these speeches, provided by observation and everyday experience, seems to have no room for objection, and this is a reason why it appears with more evidence as a sort of imposition that is not in accordance with the specific child and the child of the dominant social imaginaries. Therefore, some people interpret protagonism as an ideology when one refers to childhood protagonism, because it is interpreted as forcing a reality from a text (see the interesting article by Cohn 2002, pp. 134--140).

Théry (1991) referred to the Convention as a new ideology on childhood, so much more, when this discourse was not in accordance with everyday practice, making evident a sense of a lack of respect toward them and a growing and a subtle



means of control of adult society over childhood, even though, for others, it was an expression of living the barbarity of premodern centuries in full modernity (Sarmiento 2002, p. 14).

We must assume that it is always possible to reduce the best approaches and proposals to an ideology if when using them we become theoretically dogmatic, rigid, apodictic, closed, and static. When we talk about the protagonism of children and adolescents, we try to maintain openness and an analytic and investigative concern (see the relevant annotations of Castro 2004, p. 69). Perhaps another example than that of Castro could have been the interpretation that Hart (1997, pp. 11-15) could have had on the discourse on protagonism when he suggests that there is an excess of naive enthusiasm in the work with children. This is because the paradigm of protagonism emerges as a different horizon than the one that underlies adult society when it emphasizes the paradigm of protection as that which rules the responsibility of the family, the adult world, in the face of childhood. What Hart emphasizes in the use of the participation ladder, i.e., his warning about the handling by adults to which children can be subjected and of *tokenism* as a permanent risk, is not foreign to this interpretation. The warning is relevant, taking into account not falling into a paranoia that sees open manipulation everywhere when children, especially those organized or belonging to the social movements of NATs, simply have divergent thinking or an alternative thesis to those trends seldom held in the professional and adult world. In some cases, this saving visceral mistrust is one of the expressions of underestimation and downgrading of the capacities of children; more than an offense to adults who work with children, it is an offense to children.

In the past 30 years, new dimensions on the discourse of protagonism have been developing in an attempt to unite and complement protagonism to political action, social citizenship, and public presence. Protagonism also deals with personality, talent, and a way of life and behavior, with a transparent style of acting in the social ambit but also in the personal life in the field of what is private as well as public, with values aimed at growing in solidarity, an incessant search for justice and peaceful coexistence, and development of the phratry. In this regard, protagonism is not seen, it is made evident only through the lifestyle, the type of personality, and human quality and warmth. The Peruvian Movement of organized NATs expressed it well in its Declaration of Principles and thus reflected in its articles:

Article 14: We believe that protagonism is a right of all people, of every human being and as such, children as part of childhood enjoy this right and the right to exercise it.

Article 15: Being a protagonist for us is a responsibility that exerts us quality, excellence in the initiatives, in the opinions, in the proposals that we present so that they may have social force, possibility of reception.

Article 16: We are protagonists, but we must learn to be it. The MNNATSOP (Peruvian National Working Children and Adolescents Organized) (1997) is a space for forming in ourselves a protagonist personality, i.e., to be **humble**, with self-esteem, **flexible**, with our own identity; **tolerant**, with fundamental convictions; **entrepreneur**, with solid initiatives; **responsible**, with great

imagination; **solidarity** in the promotion of the protagonism of others (boldfacing is ours).

It seems legitimate to address the development of protagonism as the effort to shape a culture in which all human beings who are consolidating their interdependence can guide it to favor the growth as individually and collectively caring autonomous beings. In particular, the discourses on protection can let the actual relationship of power between the adult world and childhood go unnoticed, or at least postpone this component of the relationship. From the paradigm of the promotion of child protagonism and its conceptual perspective, it is then impossible to evade the issues dealing with asymmetric society, adult-centered as in the family, school, and the wider community, i.e., the power division of age. None of this is transformed by simply reengineering family, school, or community. It is a radical cultural transformation, one from the deepest roots of the patriarchal culture that women have largely been able to make evident its dire consequences and have progressed in many fields. However, the issue of children is still prey to that resistant adult-centered patriarchy in which childhood continues, above any speech in opposition and not made real in the historic fabric, to be relegated to the domestic world, to the private scope. That is where the adult-centered patriarchy continues to reproduce itself, in both men and women. Perhaps this is the axis on which the paradigm of childhood protagonism should find the *groove* and attach itself and make this protagonism seen as an interest of all of society, democracy, and citizenship. Therefore, protagonism should not become an ideology that simplifies reality, depriving it of its capacity to be sensible, precisely because it coincides with an attribute of the human condition and not with particular interests, as could be those of children, thus being all recognized as coprotagonists of their society.

It could be argued that the apology for protagonism could end up being another factor that proves the thesis of those who maintain the disappearance of childhood; if this means that the forms in which childhood has been represented in adultist societies and the roles that have been assigned to them, we would agree with it. In a change of epoch, the rigid borders established and protected by arbitrary periodization that evolutionary psychology has left us are rapidly being blurred. For Sánchez-Parga (2004, pp. 69-76), in an internet culture, emerging generations have started on a path, without return, to previously unsuspected ways of understanding the world, self-representing relationships between the different age groups, and understanding time and the setup of space. Therefore, to consider protagonism as a culture opens a greater and more complex horizon, since it refers to all the practices. From this perspective of protagonism, one better understands the emergence of social movements that raised the discourse in an embryonic way. This is because protagonism refers to a semantic and symbolic field with a broad spectrum, and among its elements is that ideas are a necessary component of maintaining the cohesion and unity of the movements or the social collectives. In addition, the protagonist approach as a culture invites us to consider its way of life and of informing us on social life. In this sense, the protagonist culture is building up symbolic capital, which, in the case of the social movements of NATs, one might wonder how it is being invested, i.e., what capacity do these organizations have to inspire new representations

of childhood, of being the seed of an epistemology of childhood from the theoretical practices that can be raised beyond the borders of their own organization? Child as subject of the right to be protagonist is an internal matter of society and of democracy.

### **86.8 Protagonist Participation as a Component of a New Social Contract**

The serious and unmasked misfortunes that fall into the poverty-stricken and ill-treated childhoods are not the basis of this task, they are only indicators of the need and urgency of doing so in the perspective of a political, ethical, social, and intertranscultural project. Thus, the mere act of creatively imagining a new social contract, one that expresses no trauma, experience, or humiliating condition that has been inherited in time, can define or determine the future of childhoods. To dare speak of a new social contract, rather than marking the emancipating limits of the contract of modernity, is a real sign of the resilience of generations of children and adolescents and of those who have linked their lives to the emancipation from all that denies their dignity. It expresses the liberating energy that shelters the progress achieved by generations of the conquest of respect and recognition of dignity.

Today, the inherited social contract of modernity and industrial society (of limited 'application in the South) is being displaced by another contract that, with greater extension and violence due to the context of excluding globalization, is at the origin of the current conflict. This has been characterized by, among other things, the standardization caused by means of cultural and social production, the communication revolution, the flow accompanied by indolent, instrumental, and cynical reason, and the permanent tendency to the think alone. All of this has been made into common sense and naturalized, almost made biological. To talk about protagonism is to refer oneself as the subject, the individual, the reason as the producer of critical and complex thinking.

Therefore, it deals with making protagonism a component of the proposal for a new social contract that focuses on the dignity of all subjects and that contributes to the deconstruction and re-elaboration of ideologies, common sense, and megatrends that historically have installed themselves and are carriers of new forms of colonizing the spirits, consciences, and subjectivities.

The new contract will not be free of conflicts, uncertainties, complexities, and passions. Protagonism appears then as a hypothesis of cultural transformation needed to nourish itself permanently on the emancipator force of critical thinking, on the assessment of the subject, the person, and the dialogue between reason and subject in its wholeness, and on the subject and all of his/her surroundings. Protagonism is not something spontaneous, and in the concrete, it becomes a cultural and social result. The fact that each individual is a unique being on an ontological level does not guarantee a natural evolution to protagonism in the historical fabric. What is needed is a new social contract that will make the new generations not only valid speakers but coprotagonists of their society. That challenges us to create conditions for overcoming the more flagrant and threatening

disagreements of harmonious intergenerational relations. We are witnessing a depletion of the social contract inherited from modernity that summons us to a new social contract and requires a new language, reflecting not only respect for the new generations, but recognizing them as social actors and cobuilders of a society based on another horizon of humanization.

It is evident that participation as such is necessary but insufficient, particularly in the context of the dominant modern social contract, because participation is functional on behalf of other ends that simultaneously exceed and involve it. In other words, the participation of children is neither socially neutral nor pedagogically universal, nor is it ethically and axiologically indifferent. Its aim is not only to develop technical or sociable capacities, but also to exercise values or, more precisely, exercise virtues.

Let us pose some minimum components of a new social contract from the childhoods:

- A culture of peace based on justice and unrestricted applicability of human, economic, social, and cultural rights.
- A participatory democratic culture in which the rights of CA are really valid under the Convention of the United Nations signed and ratified by our States.
- A culture of specific rights for children of indigenous peoples, since the rights recognized in the CRC for people of the South with major contingents of indigenous people are insufficient. Recognition of the rights of their childhoods consistent with the rights of indigenous people is required.
- A culture of citizenship of Our America in which the CA of the region identify themselves as solidarity citizens of a Great Nation, or Abya-Yala, and beyond, a world in which there is space for all the worlds.
- Nations in which childhoods, adolescents, and youth are recognized as really significant with respect to the distribution of the wealth of the country, setting no less than 6 % as a non-negotiable amount with other priorities, i.e., intangible. Within this global priority, the first ages must have primacy.
- Nations in which all forms of slavery or exploitation, looting of nonrenewable resources and ancestral territories, abuse, violence, and physical and humiliating punishment against CA be formally prohibited and effectively sanctioned by means of national and international legislation.
- Nations in which lovingness and tenderness report political culture, i.e., that they may saturate the social, political, and cultural tasks and the inter- and intragenerational relationships, and that they may fertilize a culture of respect, excellence, solidarity, and justice.

## **86.9 Child Participation as a Component of the Well-Being of Society as a Whole**

Up to now it is not clear that the *well-being* of childhood is something that directly touches the well-being of society. We can accept this as a theoretical discourse but not the profound implications that are at stake when relating human welfare and

well-being of childhoods, Otherwise, we would not be present at the scandal of reality in which tens of thousands of CA daily die worldwide from objectively avoidable causes. The worst thing is that this shameful reality for the standard-bearers of sustainable development, well-being, and progress is no more a fact than that it should be included in the objectives of United Nations Millennium Development, and its subsequent compliance is really at stake by 2015.

Child participation as a component of the well-being of all of society is clearly expressed in the declarative stand issued on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the CRC the Bureau International Catholique de L'Enfance (BICE) of the Latin American Region which states:

1. "The participation of children: good for them and necessary for society. In the past 20 years there has been a process of participatory ascent with the antecedent of valuable experiences in Latin America in the organisation of children and adolescents previous to the approval of the CRC, such is the case of working children in Peru, the National Movement of Meninos e Meninas of Rua from Brazil, los Chicos de Pelota de Trapo of Argentina, those of Callescuela of Paraguay, MOANI in Chile and Venezuela, and MAC in Brazil, Bolivia and Colombia, the School Councils and grass-root communal organisations irnpelled by an open and convoking church. In all the countries of the region, the exercise of the right to participate becomes an important catalyst in the transformation of the dominant cultures of childhood inherited and still present in society. What has been called the promotion of the paradigm of protagonist participation keeps on growing among the NGOs, the Networks of organisations of children and adolescents, parish groups, teachers of all educational levels, police personnel specialised on family and childhood, justice administrators, scholars of child reality, etc. In other words, that children and adolescents may not only have social impact, but that their acting may be an exercise of their own autonomy, freedom of opinion, dialogue, openness of spirit and respect for he who is different, for the divergence and the right to conscientious objection. But in particular, that they may always seek excellence, quality and the basis of what they propose, because there lies the strength and contribution to change. Children are learning to negotiate; to know that one does not always obtain what one poses or suggests, the meaning of being left in minority and to continue working as has been democratically agreed."
2. What has been called capability approach reminds us that autonomy is not only a condition of freedom as an axis of development, it is also a factor of emotional and affective *well-being* and of a harmonious and balancing subjectivity (Muñiz 2009, p. 62). For Santibañez (2009, pp. 63--04), none of this precludes accepting criticism that has been raised about this *capabilities approach* due to its individualizing bias.
3. Only real improvement of the social imaginary that tends to see the emergence of children in the public spaces as a threat to adult authority could merge the experience of feeling that far from being dangerous, it is an opportunity of well-being for society.
4. Perhaps the implementation of the Best Interest of the Child could possibly have a beneficial effect on the well-being of all of society, family, school, community,

and nation. A reading of the Best Interest of the Child as referring to the well-being of society as a whole can show why caring for childhood is a benefit for all. As the Director of IPEC-ILO remembered a few years ago in Geneva during a meeting convened by the World Council of Churches, which had the direct participation of boys and girls from all continents, at the level of the UN structures: "We do not know what to do so that children can actually participate when there are things that concern them, since the protocols at those levels are very complex and require periods of forecast." The message was clear: accept seriously the participation of the CA in these bodies and demand a profound transformation of structures of operation and the validity of agreements which, if tried, would take a long time as they are permanently installed and upgraded cultures and always have the complex point of view of the adult world.

### 86.10 Some Open Issues

We note that there still are worrying trends to be mindful of with respect to the participation of CA:

1. The right to participation is still insufficiently recognized and exercised by children; the collected speeches tend to highlight the *ought to be*, giving priority to sustained practices.
2. There is an emphasis on linking participation with full protection of the Convention, on the family level and the community level.
3. In general, there is a tendency to visualize the importance of participation as a cumulative experience for the future performance of the child as an individual. It has to do with *preparation*, making participation monitored and controlled by the adults in charge of the boys and girls.
4. Legislation in many countries of the South echoes the shyness and indirect language of the CRC when it refers to participation. There are some exceptions, but the tendency is to maintain a certain ambiguity about social, civic, and political participation.
5. It is necessary to question a society in which the word of the child has no social weight, and in which forms of tutelage, legal representation, a representative of the child, and the word of the child lack social and political weight when a decision is made that affects them. The advances in criminal justice are still insufficient in this area.
6. Formal, official, mediated participation continues to be a show which formally says that children do participate in what concerns them. However, the dominant democratic cultures in all areas maintain a situation that sees participation as a threat rather than a necessary component of well-being of society as a whole.
7. It is not sufficient to talk about new cultures of childhood if one states that the CRC is the bearer of a new vision on childhood; we should equally recognize that the CRC is also the bearer of the need for a new culture of adulthood. One cannot build a new historical sense, a new common sense on childhood and leave untouched the dominant cultures of adulthood.

Among the issues that must be considered not only in a conceptual analysis but also in a legal, methodological, and didactic one, we point out the following:

- (a) The exercise of the right to participation of the boys and girls of the first childhood up to 3 years.
- (b) The participation of institutionalized children in the social life of the city, the school, the town, etc.
- (c) Participation in social life of children deprived of their liberty because of conflicts with the law.
- (d) Chronological age as a limit on participation of children.
- (e) The issue of citizenship and childhood: theoretical assumptions and practical threats.
- (f) Participation in the context of hardening of guardianship and punishment.
- (g) Approach on the paradoxes of participation.
- (h) Conflicting aspects of the participation of the NATs at the regional, national, and international level in the framework of the ILO Conventions 138 and 182: conventions that do not favor the well-being of the NATs in their societies.
- (i) Discriminatory and humiliating language against the NATs and romantic callings to participation.
- (j) Difficulties and possibilities of participation in the family, school, community, and territory setting.
- (k) Indicators of protagonist participation.
- (l) Coprotagonism as a way to direct the concrete exercise of the right to participate in adultist contexts, and as a path to achieving a high-intensity democracy.

We must remember that there are some indicators of a clear recognition that the right and exercise of participation allow children to go on winning a positive visibility, a true public space as an expression of political socialization, and contribute to changing their status as children.

In short, participation today cannot be subject to begging those who always saw how they were ignored and even attacked their right to be actors in the evolution of their own lives and history. The well-being of society also depends on the transformation of cultures, which today are hegemonic with respect to childhoods and adulthood and that the right to coprotagonist participation includes without any discrimination some of the new generations, particularly CA.

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