Revisiting the concept of ‘child participation...’

Presented by:

Musa Chibwana, PhD
CRNSA Regional Coordinator
Child participation versus child’s view

UNCRC ARTICLE 12

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

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

ACRWC ARTICLE 7: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

• Every child who is capable of communicating his or her own views shall be assured the rights to express his opinions freely in all matters and to disseminate his opinions subject to such restrictions as are prescribed by laws.
Key Observations in the UNCRC & ACRWC

1. The idea of **assurance** hence need for financed platforms
2. The idea of **capability** hence capacity building of the children
3. The idea of **expression** hence mechanisms for children to use different mechanisms to express
4. The idea of **own views** which means independent thinking
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Children identify a problem in their school, initiate a project to solve it and convince adults to run it.

Children produce their own school newspaper or radio programme.

Children are asked to participate in planning a playground.

Children are consulted by a city mayor about a certain question; their opinions are taken seriously.

A group of children is organised to do community work but they are informed of its purpose and feel ownership of the issue.

Articulate children are selected to sit on a discussion panel with no substantive preparation and no consultation with their peers.

Children sing and dance at an event but have little idea of what it is all about.

Children are organised to participate in political demonstration carrying political placards.
Critique of Hart’s Ladder of participation

• Focuses on **formal, projectised participation** only
• Does not identify children as individuals, **focuses only on groups**
• Provides a **linear approach** and yet practice is more complex than this...
• Considers children as a **homogeneous group** yet there are several nuances to this...
• The **focus on participation** assumes that ‘due weight’ is given to the views of the child
In view of this, my submission is to find mechanisms of strengthening children's Agency

- Human agency can be defined as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment (Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A., 1998).

- The human capability to exert influence over one's functioning and the course of events by one's actions” (Bandura 2009a, p. 8).

- Some of the characteristics associated with agency include selfhood, determinism, motivation, will, purposiveness, intentionality, choice, initiative, freedom, and creativity.
Types of agency

• Personal/ self efficacy
  • High-efficacy people are **confident of their abilities**
  • People with lower self efficacy **set lower goals**
  • High-efficacy people generally **feel less threatened by challenges** and more likely to consider them exciting

• Proxy
  • This **is socially mediated mode of agency** where people try to get other people who have expertise or wield influence and power to act on their behalf to get the outcomes they desire

• Collective
  • Human beings do not live in individual autonomy...
  • People’s shared beliefs in their **collective power to produce desired results** are key ingredient of collective agency
  • Collective action, that is **coordinated and harnessing each’s competencies produces results**
The Difference Between Self-Efficacy & Self-Esteem

Often used interchangeably as though they represent the same phenomenon, when in fact they refer to entirely different things.

• **Self-Efficacy:** Concerned with judgments of personal capabilities
  • *Example:* “I’m going to pass my matric!”

• **Self-Esteem:** Concerned with judgment of self-worth
  • *Example:* “I’m a terrible person.”
Self efficacy

• It influences whether people think **erratically** or **strategically**
• It influences **the goals which people set for themselves** and their commitment to them
• How **much stress and depression one experiences** in coping with taxing environmental demands
• Their **resilience to adversity**
• Adaptation **to change and new environments**
Sources of Self-Efficacy

1. **Actual Performance**: Success builds a strong belief in one’s personal efficacy, and failure undermines it.

2. **Vicarious Experiences**: appraising one’s capabilities in relation to the attainment of others

3. **Verbal Persuasion**: easier to sustain a sense of efficacy, especially when struggling with difficulties, if significant others express faith in one’s capabilities than if they convey doubts

4. **Psychological Cues**: In judging their capabilities, people rely partly on somatic information conveyed by physiological and emotional states.
Conclusion

• The most recommended model of child participation is one that builds on the child’s agency first.
• It’s a model that is fluid, flexible and recognising that children are not a monolithic group.
• It’s a model that appreciates the three levels of agency:
  • Personal
  • Proxy
  • Collective.