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Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

IUL School of Social Sciences

Department of Social and Organizational Psychology

Children's right to participate in early childhood education:

From rights to empirical evidence

Nadine Elisabete Fernandes Gomes Correia

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor in Psychology

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Abstract

Children's right to participate has gained recognition in society in general, and in various areas of scientific research in particular. Children's right to participate refers to children's right to be heard, and to have their perspectives considered, influencing decisions affecting them. The promotion of children's participation is recommended from an early age, namely in early childhood education (ECE) settings, and it is considered an important criterion for assessing the quality of these settings. Nonetheless, little empirical evidence exists on children's right to participate in ECE. Therefore, our goal was to provide new insights on this topic. For this purpose, we first conducted a systematic review of the literature on children's right to participate in ECE, mapping research conducted in this field. Further, we developed measures to assess children's ideas, and ECE teachers' ideas and practices towards the promotion of participation. Finally, we documented children's and teachers' ideas about children's participation in ECE, and investigated associations between teachers' ideas and practices, and children's perceptions of their participation. Our findings highlight the associations between teachers' ideas and practices, and children's perceived participation, suggesting the importance of both objective and subjective properties of ECE settings in promoting children's participation. We provide an integrative discussion of the theoretical, practical, and policy implications of our findings.

Resumo

O direito de participação das crianças ganhou reconhecimento na sociedade, em diversas áreas do conhecimento e na investigação. A participação das crianças refere-se ao direito de serem ouvidas e terem as suas perspectivas consideradas, influenciando as decisões que lhes dizem respeito. A participação é recomendada desde cedo, nomeadamente em contextos de educação de infância, sendo descrita como um importante critério para a avaliação da qualidade destes contextos. No entanto, existe pouca evidência sobre o direito de participação das crianças em contextos de educação de infância. Com base em quatro estudos, procurou-se investigar e expandir o conhecimento sobre este tema. Realizou-se uma revisão sistemática de literatura sobre o direito de participação das crianças em contextos de educação de infância, mapeando a investigação existente. Desenvolveram-se medidas para avaliar as ideias das crianças bem como as ideias e práticas dos/as educadores/as de infância sobre o direito de participação. Foram documentadas as ideias de crianças e de educadores/as de infância sobre a participação, e investigadas as associações entre as ideias e práticas dos/as educadores/as e as percepções das crianças sobre a sua participação. Os resultados salientam o papel crucial das ideias e das práticas dos/as educadores/as para a participação das crianças, realçando a importância das propriedades objetivas e subjetivas dos contextos. Os resultados são discutidos atendendo às suas implicações teóricas, práticas e políticas.

Palavras-Chave:

Direito de participação das crianças, Participação, Ideias, Práticas, Educação de infância

PsycINFO Codes:

2220 Testes e Avaliação

2956 Educação Infantil & Cuidados Infantis

3430 Características e Atitudes Pessoais e Profissionais

3560 Dinâmicas de Sala de Aula e Ajustamento e Atitudes dos Alunos

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The main topic of this dissertation is children's right to participate in early childhood education (ECE) settings. Participation, a fundamental right of all children, has gained progressive recognition in different areas of knowledge, and increased visibility in society in general (Burger, 2018). The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations General Assembly, 1989), the most comprehensive legal document binding children's participation rights, was the most important milestone in this respect. Nonetheless, the study of participation has also benefited from concepts emerging from the new sociology of childhood, namely the consideration of children as rights holders, with competences and agency to participate (Corsaro, 2005; James & Prout, 2003).

This research project is grounded in the definition of children's right to participate proposed by the CRC, thirty years ago: *the right to be heard, and to have their perspectives considered from an early age, thus influencing the course of events and situations affecting them* (Hart, 1992; United Nations General Assembly, 1989). This definition is anchored in the notion of children's evolving competences, referring to children's capacity to understand, think, and choose with some degree of autonomy, influencing decision making (Lansdown, 2005).

Participation is acknowledged as a complex process, embedded in cultural and social contexts and, more specifically, in significant relational contexts, such as ECE (Hart, 1992; Lansdown, 2001). Relatedly, ECE is described as a fundamental microsystem for children (e.g., Melhuish, 2014), and participation occurs in the context of teacher-child interactions taking place in these contexts. Therefore, adults' role in promoting a culture of participation is important for children to have access and legitimacy to effectively participate and exert influence (Kanyal, 2014; Lundy, 2007; Senecah, 2004).

Participation has also been described as an important criterion to be considered when assessing ECE settings' quality. Indeed, it has been proposed that assessments of ECE settings' quality must include children's voices (Katz, 2006; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). In turn, the quality of teacher-child interactions, often considered a main feature of process quality (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008), is described as fundamental for children's development (e.g., Coplan & Prakash, 2003). Thus, besides grounding our research in the definition of participation advanced by the CRC (United Nations General Assembly, 1989), we also analyse participation from an ECE quality perspective.

In addition, participation is recognized as bringing potential outcomes for children's socio-cognitive development, such as greater self-esteem, or communication, conflict resolution, and decision making skills (e.g., Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin, & Sinclair, 2003; Sinclair, 2004). Importantly, participation also provides the basis for other rights and for citizenship, contributing to children's wellbeing (e.g., Hart & Brando, 2018; Kanyal, 2012), and benefiting the community in which children live (Hart, 1992). However, despite the presumed relevance of promoting children's right to participate in ECE, research on this topic is still scarce, disperse, and conducted mostly in the fields of sociology and education. Also, lacking its own theoretical framework, children's participation has been informed by distinct fields of knowledge (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010), with different theories and models often used interrelatedly (Malone & Hartung, 2010).

The studies presented in this dissertation were developed within the perspectives of developmental, educational, and sociocultural psychology, and integrate features of these different perspectives in the study of children's right to participate. We also describe the importance of legal and sociological perspectives, as well as of social policy. Under this broad theoretical umbrella, we aim to go beyond existing studies, by integrating different perspectives and providing a contribution from the field of psychology. Specifically, we aim to expand knowledge about children's right to participate in ECE by considering different actors (i.e., children and teachers) and levels of analysis (e.g., ideas and practices).

Thus, the main objectives of this work are to: (a) synthesize previous research about children's right to participate in ECE; (b) develop valid measures to assess children's and ECE teachers ideas, and ECE teachers' practices to promote child participation; and (c) explore associations between ECE teachers' ideas and practices, and children's ideas (i.e., perceptions) about their own right to participate in ECE. With this research, we seek to provide empirical evidence on children's right to participate, to further inform ECE professionals, and society in general, about the conditions needed to understand and promote children's participation rights.

Considering these objectives, this dissertation is organized in six chapters (see Figure 1). In the first chapter, which refers to the general theoretical framework, we present the various definitions and conceptualizations of participation: from its increased recognition, to the importance of the CRC, describing existing models of participation, and adjacent concepts. In addition, we describe how different areas of knowledge provide specific contributions to the study of children's right to participate in ECE, and we describe the Portuguese context. This chapter also outlines the relevance of this research and presents its specific objectives.

The second chapter refers to a systematic review of literature on children's right to participate in ECE, from 1980 to 2017. Our aim is to map research conducted on children's right to participate in ECE, identifying existing studies, definitions and methods used, as well as main findings. Systematic reviews provide timely information both for policy and practice, allowing the adoption of evidence-based decisions and practices (Ang, 2018). Within this topic, and considering the specificities of the ECE context, a systematic review is particularly relevant, given the scarcity and disperse nature of extant empirical evidence. Therefore, it is important to map current knowledge about children's right to participate in ECE.

In the third chapter, we introduce the empirical section of this dissertation. Given the lack of measures to assess children's ideas about their right to participate, this chapter presents a study conducted to develop and pilot a structured interview: "Choosing classrooms: A structured interview on children's right to participate". This interview is developed with the specific purpose of assessing children's conceptions, expectations, and perceptions about their right to participate. Simultaneously, this study aims to hear children's voices, listening to their perspectives on their right to participate in their everyday life in ECE, recognizing children as competent and knowledgeable actors, and valuing their perspectives and experiences (Clark & Moss, 2005; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001).

In the fourth chapter, we present a study aimed at investigating ECE teachers' ideas about children's right to participate in ECE, seeking to disentangle teachers' ideas in a systematic way. We acknowledge the importance of ECE teachers' ideas (Fives & Buehl, 2012), particularly their ideas about participation (e.g., Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010). To go beyond existing research, we aim to identify complex profiles of ECE teachers' ideas about child participation, investigating subsequent associations between these profiles and teachers' individual characteristics (e.g., teachers' age), and ECE context variables (e.g., type of setting). In fact, although literature suggests, for instance, that teachers' characteristics influence their beliefs (e.g., Fives & Buehl, 2012), to our knowledge, so far, associations between ECE teachers' ideas about child participation and teachers' characteristics have not been addressed.

As for the fifth chapter, given the importance of considering multiple informants (Sabol & Pianta, 2012), we investigate associations between teachers' ideas (i.e., conceptions) and children's ideas (i.e., perceptions) about children's right to participate in ECE. Aiming to address different levels of analysis, such as knowledge structures (i.e., ideas), and action (i.e., practices) (Sigel & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 2002; Vieira, 2017), we seek to investigate the mediating role of teacher's practices, both self-reported and observed, as mechanisms linking teachers' and children's ideas. More specifically, and in line with research suggesting that the

promotion of children's participation is linked to ECE settings quality (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001), we focus on teachers' practices to promote participation, but also observed process quality (i.e., teacher-child interactions quality). Notably, this chapter introduces two measures to assess ECE teachers' perceived and observed participation practices, while also using a widely recognized measure of ECE process quality (Pianta, et al., 2008). By investigating these associations, until now unexplored, we acknowledge the importance of teachers' ideas and practices for improving educational processes (OECD, 2009), and their capacity to influence children's conceptions and experiences (Oliveira-Formosinho & Lino, 2008; Smith, 2002).

The sixth and concluding chapter of this work offers an overview of our studies, highlighting the main contributions of this research project. In it, we reflect on the main findings and their implications, for both research and practice, and on how this work can inform interventions targeting professional development in ECE. Finally, we also reflect on the implications of our findings for policy making and for theory.

Figure 1 presents the outline of the rationale, problem overview, and research questions that guided this work, identifying the chapters that compose this dissertation.

Rationale

• Growing recognition of children's right to participate in ECE • Participation as a criterion to be considered when assessing ECE settings' quality • Participation taking place in the context of teacher-child interactions • Participation as fundamental for children's socio-cognitive development

Chapter I: Theoretical background

Problem overview

• Limited, disperse evidence on children's right to participate in ECE (i.e., lack of a systematic mapping of research) • Lack of measures to assess children's ideas (e.g., conceptions, expectations, perceptions), and teachers' ideas (e.g., conceptions, perceptions) and practices about children's right to participate in ECE • Lack of empirical evidence on children's ideas, teachers' ideas and practices, and associations between teachers' ideas and practices, and children's perceptions of the right to participate in ECE

Research questions and studies

What research exists on children's right to participate in ECE?	What are children's ideas about their own right to participate?	What are teachers' ideas about children's right to participate in ECE?	Are teachers' ideas associated with children's perceptions? Is this association mediated by teachers' perceived participation practices? Do teachers' perceived practices influence children's perceptions, mediated by observed practices and ECE process quality?
Chapter II: ***What does research say:*** *Children's right to participate in ECE: A systematic review*	***Chapter III:*** ***What do children say:*** *Choosing classrooms: An interview on children's right to participate in ECE*	***Chapter IV:*** ***What do teachers say:*** *Teachers' ideas about children's right to participate in ECE*	***Chapter V:*** ***Associations between teachers' ideas, practices and children's perceptions***: *Teachers' practices mediate the association between teacher's ideas and children's perceived participation in ECE*

Discussion/Future implications   *Chapter VI: Discussion*
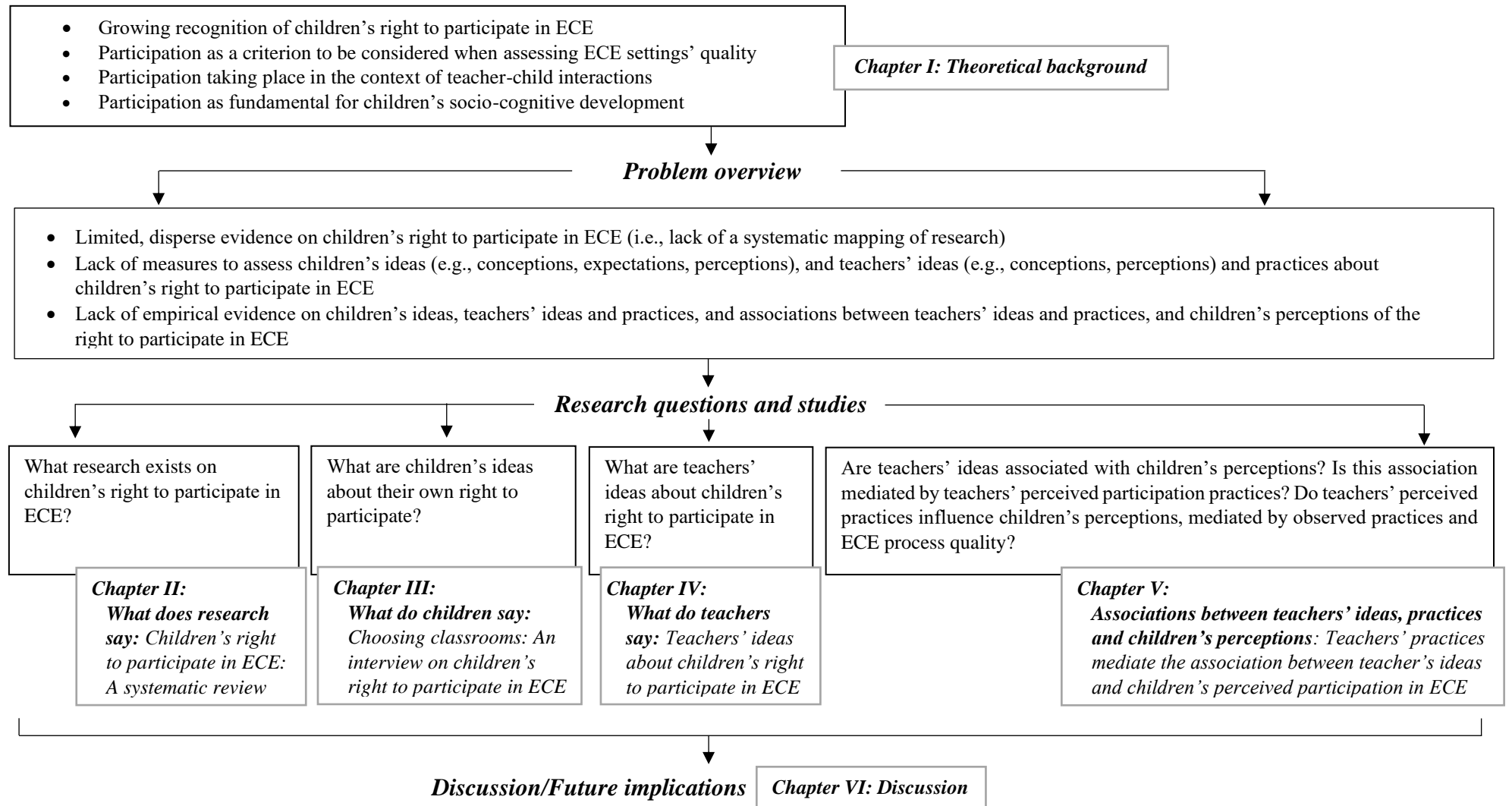
Figure 1. Outline of the rationale, problem overview, research questions, studies, and chapters.

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CHAPTER I | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

I. Children's right to participate in early childhood education: An overview

1.1. Children's right to participate: Growing recognition

There is a growing recognition of children's right to participate, described as an essential element of human rights-based societies (Burger, 2018; Lansdown, 2010). Children's right to participate emerges from shared decision making processes regarding issues affecting children's lives, as well as the life of the community in which children live. Participation thus refers to a complex process, depending on children's motivations and competences, but also on features of the family, community, and education context (Hart, 1992).

If fully implemented, participation constitutes one of the biggest transformations towards a culture of respect for children's rights. It represents the commitment to values and principles of democracy and citizenship, and to children's competences to contribute towards their own wellbeing (Lansdown, Jimerson, & Shahroozi, 2014). However, children have been described as one of the last groups in society to be granted access to rights (Franklin, 2002), particularly to the right to participate, which has often been overshadowed by children's right to protection from abuse and harm (Such, 2014).

Over time, there have been major changes in the status and space occupied by children in society. While two centuries ago children were seen as dependent on adults and subject to their control, during the last century they were seen as in need of protection. More recently, children became considered social actors and rights-holders, with voice and competence to participate in decision making processes affecting them (Such, 2014; Thomas, 2007). Further, it is acknowledged that by living and interacting with other people, in family, community, and education contexts, children develop, from an early age, their own cognitions and emotions about what surrounds them (Lansdown, 2005). Moreover, the earlier children are heard and exercise their right to express their perspectives, the better (Hart, 1992).

Given the relatively recent recognition of children's participation, there is no solid and distinctive theoretical background on this topic. Therefore, research and practice have been informed by a vast range of theoretical frameworks (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). For instance, the reconceptualization of children and childhood was in part driven by sociology, particularly the new sociology of childhood (Corsaro, 2005; James & Prout, 2003), as well as by the advocacy field, which allowed the discourse on children's rights to spread within policy and advocacy institutions. Importantly, addressing children's views and voices (i.e., concepts oriented to action and change, often used as metaphors for participation, and arising from the

new sociology of childhood) was fundamental to consider children's own positioning and experiences (Kanyal, 2012; Kanyal & Gibbs, 2014).

Nonetheless, it was the nearly universally accepted Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations General Assembly, 1989), that largely contributed to the deconstruction of protectionist paradigms of childhood, and the emergence of more complex images of children (Soares & Tomás, 2004). Before the CRC, the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (League of Nations, 1924) was the first international human rights document in history to discuss children's wellbeing and to recognize children's rights. However, it was not legally binding, and it did not refer to children's right to participate. Similarly, the Declaration on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1959), that preceded the CRC, did not address children's participation rights.

1.1.1. The Convention on the Rights of the Child

The CRC, established by the United Nations in 1989, is arguably the most ground-breaking human rights document, and a crucial milestone in framing and guiding the nature, scope, and implementation of children's participation rights, in diverse social spheres. Including a number of provision, protection, and participation rights, the CRC defined the rights granted to children to improve their lives. Specifically, (a) *provision* referred to the right to have access to certain resources and services (e.g., education, welfare, and health services), (b) *protection* referred to the right to be safe from certain acts and practices (e.g., child labour), and (c) *participation* referred the right to have an effective voice in society (e.g., in schools and communities) (Habashi, Wright, & Hathcoat, 2012). Together, these 3Ps allowed children to be considered as of public and political concern (Black, 1996, 2004; Habashi et al., 2012).

Article 12 of the CRC states two major components, recognizing children as active participants, and reflecting children's right to fully participate in society: the *right to express their own views*, and the *right to be heard and taken seriously*. Hence, children capable of forming their own views are entitled to freely express them, in all matters affecting them. Notably, the importance of children's right to participate was proposed from birth onwards, and therefore Article 12 must be applied to children of all ages, as stated by General Comments No. 7 and No. 12 (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005, 2009). Further, the CRC asserts countries' and adults' responsibility to listen to children's views and to facilitate their participation, giving due weight to children's perspectives, according to their age and maturity (Lansdown, 2001; Lansdown et al., 2014; United Nations Committee on the

Rights of the Child, 2005). Thus, age and maturity should be considered together with other variables such as the social context in which children live, the nature and complexity of the decision, or adult support throughout the process (Fernandes, 2009; Tomás, 2007).

Accordingly, the onus rests with adults to create the necessary time and space to listen to children's different forms of expression (Lansdown et al., 2014). The promotion of a culture of participation, where all intervenients respect, develop, and experience participatory approaches, is thus regarded as central for the implementation of children's rights. Moreover, children's rights cannot be fulfilled by discarding adults' voices and knowledge, but rather by using them for guidance and support (Kanyal, 2014). Therefore, promoting participation does not mean leaving decisions entirely up to children, but instead involving them and making them feel competent to participate in decision making processes, by communicating with them, asking questions, listening, encouraging them to develop skills to make proposals, and valuing their perspectives and positioning (Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010).

Hence, to experience the right of free expression and voice, children need to have access to conditions and opportunities to express their perspectives and choices, with appropriate support and information to understand the process, in a space with the potential for them to be heard (Kellett, 2010; Lundy, 2007). Thus, notions of access - referring to the opportunities for children to express their choices - and notions of standing - referring to legitimacy, respect, esteem, and consideration for individual perspectives - are fundamental for children to exert influence and have their perspectives given full consideration (Senecah, 2004). Relatedly, children may experience different levels of access and opportunity to integrate (or withdraw from) a collective situation, express their voice, and influence the course of events (Vieira, 2017). Participation is, therefore, frequently described in terms of levels or stages, and diverse models of participation have been proposed.

1.1.2. Models of participation

One of the first models presented, and possibly the most influential, is Hart's ladder of participation (Hart, 1992). This model was built on Arnstein's (1969) classic and influential model of participation, which described participation as taking place through some degree of power sharing and redistribution. Within Hart's ladder of participation, children's participation becomes increasingly meaningful as it moves from a level of manipulation, up to a child-initiated level, involving shared decisions with adults. Although consisting of eight levels, the first three (i.e., *manipulation, decoration, and tokenism*) are not considered truly participatory.

Tokenism, for instance, occurs when children are apparently given a voice, but have little or no choice or opportunity to formulate their ideas.

The subsequent five levels are described as appropriate for children, based on the activity they are engaged in, and on the degree to which their participatory and decision making skills have evolved. Specifically, these five participation levels refer to *being assigned but informed* (e.g., assigned a specific role and informed about how/when they will be involved), *consulted and informed* (e.g., children can give their opinion on a project designed and run by adults), *adult-initiated, shared decisions with children* (e.g., projects initiated by adults, but decision making shared with children), *child-initiated and decided* (e.g., projects initiated by children, and adults involved merely in a supportive role), and *child-initiated, shared decisions with adults* (e.g., children initiate a project and decision making is shared between children and adults). Despite contributing for a global movement for participation, Hart's ladder of participation received criticism for essentially describing adults' role in promoting participation (Reddy & Ratna, 2002). In addition, it was also criticized for proposing a hierarchy in which each level is quantitatively higher than the previous one (Horwath, Hodgkiss, Kalyva, & Spyrou, 2011).

Subsequently, new models emerged (e.g., Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin, & Sinclair, 2003; Shier, 2001; Treseder, 1997). For instance, an alternative five-level model of participation based on Hart's ladder, introduced two significant changes, considering (1) there should be *no limit to children's involvement and participation* (i.e., moving away from the idea of hierarchy), and (2) *children need to be empowered* adequately in order to fully participate (Treseder, 1997). This typology suggests that different conditions must be met for children's participation to be achieved, such as to have access to relevant information and to those in power, to have effective choices between different options, and to be supported by a trusted person (Treseder, 1997).

Similarly, a five-level model of participation (i.e., from children being listened to, to children sharing power and responsibility for decision making), named as pathways to participation (Shier, 2001), suggested three stages of commitment, referring to *openings* (i.e., practitioners' commitment to promote participation), *opportunities* (i.e., when conditions to promote participation are met), and *obligations* (i.e., when opportunities become an agreed policy of the setting), again mostly focusing on the role of adults.

A four-level model, in which no level is considered better than the other, proposed to analyse if children's *views are taken into consideration*, if children are *involved in decision*

making processes, if children *share power and responsibility* within the decision making process, and if children *make autonomous decisions* (Kirby et al., 2003). In this model, context, activities, decisions, and participants determine the appropriate level of participation.

Aiming to move the concept of children's participation further, the relationship between key elements of *space*, *voice*, *audience*, and *influence* was proposed in another participation model (Lundy, 2007), as a way of assuring the implementation of participation. Within this model, children first have the right to express their views, then their views are given due weight, and finally children are informed of the extent of influence, before the process starts again. Further, this model emphasizes the overlap between Article 12 and other provisions of the CRC, such as those referring to non-discrimination (i.e., Article 2), or to receive guidance from adults (i.e., Article 5), as well as the importance of a discursive space for children to express and develop their perspectives.

Similarly, *arenas* (i.e., public and private contexts), *scopes* (i.e., full, circumstantial or continuous, organized or spontaneous, permanent or ephemeral), *purposes* (i.e., the extent to which advocacy and dissemination of children's participation is promoted), and *conditions* for participation (i.e., recognition of child participation, competences, and means to promote it) were described as dimensions influencing the implementation and experience of child participation. In addition, instead of occurring automatically, participation is described as a gradual process requiring time and learning opportunities for children to know and understand power relations (Tomás, 2007).

The existence of different models of children's participation reflects the growing interest in involving children in decision making (Sinclair, 2004). Still, sometimes it is not clear to what extent children's participation should be promoted, nor to what extent it is meaningful and impactful. In addition, participatory experiences are frequently described as having an episodic character (Trevisan, 2014). For these reasons, participation levels should be carefully considered, and not taken in a strict hierarchical order, with the risk of becoming too critical and rigid (Kanyal & Gibbs, 2014).

Importantly, the multidimensional character of participation should be noted (e.g., (Almqvist, Uys, & Sandberg, 2007), as well as the complex and diverse aspects that influence children's right to participate (Sarmento, 2013), from individuals to contexts (Vieira, 2017). Consideration for these complex, multi-layered aspects should contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of participation processes. Further, a combination of different models and perspectives on how children's right to participation should be interpreted and promoted, as well as of new concepts arising from political and socio-cultural perspectives,

might help conceptualize the field (Thomas, 2007). Nonetheless, theorists agree that there is still some way to go before advancing a comprehensive theory of children's right to participate (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010).

1.1.3. Adjacent concepts

Despite the existence of different conceptualizations, and the complex and polysemic meaning of participation (Vieira, 2017), there is a broad consensus in recognizing children's agency and competences, and potential participation benefits for their wellbeing (MacNaughton, Hudges, & Smith, 2007; Tomás, 2008). Therefore, notions of power, agency, autonomy, involvement, and citizenship, described hereafter, are particularly important to understand children's participation and the paradigm shift responsible for considering children's constructive roles in society (Burger, 2018).

Power and empowerment. The debate on children's participation is grounded in notions of power and empowerment, particularly addressed by the field of sociology, and in relation to children's voice and competence (Alanen & Mayall, 2003; Christensen, 2004; Thomas, 2007). Within psychology, empowerment has been defined as a construct linking individual strengths and competences, which contribute to increase individuals' degree of autonomy, enabling them to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way (Rappaport, 1995; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988). Relatedly, participation enables and empowers children to represent their views and interests, influence decision making processes, and take some degree of control over their lives (Hart, 1992; Herbots & Put, 2015; Lansdown, 2010; Menezes, 2003; Taylor & Robinson, 2009; Thomas, 2007). Thus, assumptions about power and empowerment, associated with concepts of domination and decision making, are particularly relevant to understand participatory processes (Reddy & Ratna, 2002; Vieira, 2017).

From a Foucauldian perspective, power is described as an ambivalent notion, referring at the same time to agency and subjection; to the basis of autonomy and freedom, and as being governed; to control, resistance and self-realisation. Further, it is described as something that is exercised rather than a capacity, and as existing only through action (Foucault, 2003; Gallagher, 2008). Relatedly, empowering children involves resources and strategies, in order to pursue individual and collective objectives (Gallagher, 2008). However, historically, children have been considered as less able to decide and act than adults, due to power systems created and prolonged through generational structures (Alanen, 2011; Bühler-Niederberger, 2010). As such, the promotion of children's right to participate requires some degree of

redistribution and appropriation of power, simultaneously communicational and relational (e.g., Vieira, 2017), to enhance their social status and to avoid unbalanced power relationships and practices (Freire, 2017; Pascal & Bertram, 2009).

Participation thus requires intentionality and power, which circulates among diverse intervenients, from school directors to teachers and classroom assistants, assuming diverse forms (Foucault, 2003; Gallagher, 2008). For this reason, children's right to participate is often presented as unnecessary or a step too far, when compared to provision or protection rights, as it challenges adult authority and established power relationships (Such, 2014). Notably, assuring a balanced power redistribution guarantees that when children are granted the right to be heard, they are included in important decisions, assuring meaningful participation and respect for their agency (Matthews, 2003).

Agency. Discussions on children's participation are connected with the notion of agency, which takes place in the context of social relationships and interdependency, more specifically in decentralized practices in which children participate (Esser, Baader, Betz, & Hungerland, 2016; Hanson, 2016). To participate, children must be considered persons with agency, entitled to respect, and whose voices must be heard and considered (Freeman, 2007; Percy-Smith, 2016). Particularly used in the advocacy discourse, children's agency is defined as the capacity to set goals, reflect, and act responsibly to effect change, influencing what happens, and to make autonomous choices (Hanson, 2016; OECD, 2019; White, 2007). Simultaneously, agency is also related with identity construction, a positive sense of self and self-efficacy, a positive sense of purpose and of being a learner (Luff & Martin, 2014), as well as with active meaning-making practices (Varvantakis, Dragonas, Askouni, & Nolas, 2019).

To have children's agency respected, participation rights need to be premised on an understanding of children as equal members of society, with their own concerns and agendas, entitled to influence decision making affecting them (Lundy, 2007). Children exert their agency when they are able, for instance, to initiate and propose activities, shaping boundaries and connections with the others through what they say, do, and feel (Varvantakis et al., 2019), which potentially benefits their wellbeing (Roberts, 2010). However, often, children's agency is analysed from a strong normative standpoint, about what is right or wrong to do, rather than from the empirical standpoint, about children's degree of autonomy. For instance, when children do not do what is considered right or correct, breaking norms internalised through socialization process, their autonomy and agency tend to be conditioned by adults (Hanson, 2016).

Autonomy. Children's participation, by referring to children's active role and capacity to make choices, also means having a sense of autonomy (e.g., Ruck, Peterson-Badali, & Helwig, 2014). In effect, participation is grounded in children's need to gradually gain autonomy, understood as self-government and self-direction, and independent status in society (Burger, 2018; Castle, 2004; Lansdown, 2005; Lloyd & Emerson, 2017). Prior research stressed the importance of supporting children's autonomy in educational settings, describing it as the degree to which adults acknowledge children's perspectives and promote their active, self-regulated participation and engagement in decision making, fostering the harmony between children's needs and teaching practices and activities (e.g., Castle, 2004).

The promotion of autonomy-supportive styles by teachers (e.g., early childhood education teachers) is described as crucial to facilitate children's motivation, contributing to their engagement in classroom activities and offering children growth-promoting relationships (Reeve, 2006). Further, by valuing individual autonomy, participation represents the commitment to children's dignity, which is linked to the possibility of making choices, and to have an active choice (Nussbaum, 2011), and to the principles of recognition (Honneth, 1995; Thomas, 2012) and self-worth (Hicks, 2013).

Involvement. Autonomy is connected with children's involvement, which can be understood as the extent to which children are concentrated, absorbed, and engaged in activities (Laevers & Declercq, 2018), contributing to the promotion of their citizenship (Ennew, 2008). In fact, the concept of involvement is often used when referring to children's right to participate, and participation is frequently defined as children's involvement in decision making processes (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001), and as an essential element of citizenship (Hart, 2013; Pascal & Bertram, 2009).

Citizenship. Citizenship involves the individual feelings of belonging to a community, and the daily experiences entailing the exercise of one's rights and duties, but also the social relations that are established; therefore, the full exercise of citizenship is also understood as a participatory citizenship (Menezes, 2003; Menezes & Ferreira, 2014). Recognizing children as citizens, with visibility and protagonism to participate in society, therefore requires framing citizenship within a logic of rights, duties, responsibilities, and participation, contributing to the construction of individual and collective identities (Bellamy, 2008; Jans, 2004; Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Trevisan, 2014, 2016). Notably, analysing children's participation requires taking into account that children were not entitled to full citizenship for years (Cockburn, 2013; Lister, 2007). Again, this was largely dependent on various aspects, such as children being considered as fragile and needing protection, and not as competent and active beings.

Importantly, when children are respected as active citizens, effectively participating, and have the understanding, skills, and commitment needed within different social contexts, they experience and deepen their sense of democracy (Menezes & Ferreira, 2014). However, the promotion of children's participation requires not only considering children as active citizens, but also considering how citizenship can be adapted to children (Jans, 2004; Kirby et al., 2003). Supporting children's participation is thus essential to nurture citizenship over the long term, contributing to progressively embed values of democracy in children's approach to life (Lansdown, 2005).

The reconceptualization of childhood and the growing recognition of children's rights contributed for child participation to assume a central position in a wide variety of disciplines such as law, sociology, educational sciences, or social policy. Moreover, extensive documents and reports have been produced and disseminated under the auspices of organisations such as United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (e.g., Lansdown, 2005), Save the Children (2005), or Eurochild (2019), providing various frameworks and information on programs and initiatives highlighting the importance of children's participation. Nonetheless, existing information has emerged mostly from a theoretical and conceptual level, with limited research disentangling processes and outcomes of child participation. In addition, for participation to be established in different spheres of society, it is necessary to develop methods for measuring how participation is promoted, and ultimately to document how it impacts children's lives, particularly their development (Lansdown et al., 2014).

1.2. Early childhood education: One context, different perspectives

Despite the multiple definitions of participation, it is consensual that it is most meaningful when it is rooted in children's everyday lives (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). Importantly, children's right to participate can be implemented in education services, and in the case of young children, in early childhood education (ECE). ECE is described as a fundamental microsystem, consequential for children, and in certain conditions (e.g., high process quality), beneficial for their development and wellbeing (e.g., Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2010). Nevertheless, even though children's right to participate is encouraged form an early age (Hart, 1992; Lansdown, 2005), few studies have addressed participation specifically in ECE. Notably, the limited existing evidence emerges mostly from northern European countries (e.g., Almqvist et al., 2007; Sheridan, 2007; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001).

In ECE contexts, participation takes place through the relationships taking place between ECE professionals and children (e.g., Broström et al., 2015). From this educational and relational viewpoint, participation in ECE settings occurs by empowering children and developing a shared understanding about their needs, experiences, and perspectives (Kanyal, 2014). Therefore, principles of connectedness, interactions, and relationships are crucial to understand child participation in ECE (Papatheodorou, 2010). Also relevant are the ways in which adults promote relationships of trust, understanding, and acceptance, allowing children to freely express themselves (Alin, 2012). Importantly, different perspectives must be addressed when considering children's right to participate in this specific setting.

1.2.1. Legal and sociological perspectives

From a legal perspective, the CRC (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) provided the legal framework for this right, with governments striving to implement it and promote democratic school environments. When applied to the educational field, it might have implications for curricula, and ECE professionals' roles and practices. For instance, participation challenges the dominant discourses and traditional roles of practitioners, who need to reconceptualise children as competent social actors and active participants (MacNaughton et al., 2007; Woodhead, 2005). Consequently, changes in ECE professionals' roles challenge traditional views of teachers as more powerful, imposing their will, knowledge, and beliefs to children, opening space to individual reflection (Freire, 2017).

From a new sociology of childhood standpoint, children's participation in the everyday life of school settings (e.g., deciding on the content of educational activities, or on the means to implement them) is one of the crucial domains of children's participation (Sarmento, Fernandes, & Tomás, 2007). Further, children's participation and active role in the process of their own learning must be encouraged in diverse areas and activities within the ECE setting, making use of child-centred participatory approaches to empower children (Lundy & McEvoy, 2012; Thomas, 2007). The Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001), for instance, refers to a multi-methods process providing children with a range of symbolic ways to exert influence.

Both legal and sociological perspectives take into account capacity building approaches (e.g., Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 2004). These approaches highlight children's knowledge, skills, and capacity to express their perspectives and voices, participating in decision making and shaping their own environments with adults' support (Clark & Moss, 2005; Hart & Brando, 2018; Lundy, 2007). Moreover, they stress the role of agency and freedom in achieving

wellbeing, understood in terms of children's capabilities and opportunities to live according to their values and interests (Dixon & Nussbaum, 2012).

A capability approach and participation can thus complement and reinforce each other (i.e., the capability approach provides guiding principles for participation, such as ownership, accountability, and empowerment, and participation provides the methods for making the capability approach operational), helping to ensure that democratic principles are respected and become the foundation for sustainable development (Hammock, 2019). The capability approach also connects with other perspectives and is often applied to a variety of theories, such as development or social justice theories, providing a framework for children's wellbeing, development, and justice (Robeyns, 2011).

Though arising from the new sociology of childhood, principles of children as competent, active, agentic, and co-constructors of reality, spread through distinct areas within psychology (Kanyal, 2014). Consequently, distinct branches of psychology play a major role in understanding and contributing to the recognition of children's right to participate, especially in reference to children's evolving competences, competences to exert influence, and identity (e.g., Christie, Tint, Wagner, & Winter, 2008). Notably, in 2008, the American Psychological Association, namely its school division (Division 16 ([School Psychology] Social Justice and Child Rights Working Group, 2013), established a social justice and child rights working group to facilitate reflection and professional development on the promotion of children's rights and social justice.

1.2.2. Developmental perspective

The CRC (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) focuses on the rights of the child from a developmental perspective, presenting participation and autonomy as key processes in child development (Velez, 2016), and stating that all children, independently of their characteristics, should be offered conditions that promote their dignity, self-reliance, and active participation in the community. Prior research has, for instance, focused specifically on the right to participate of children with disabilities, in diverse activities and contexts (e.g., sports, health services) (e.g., Bedell et al., 2011; Eriksson & Granlund, 2004).

The notion of children's evolving competences, simultaneously a development and participatory concept, is central to the balance between recognising children as active agents in their own lives, entitled to be heard and to experience increasing autonomy and self-regulation, while also considering their progressive maturity. For instance, competences to

participate in decision making involve children's ability to understand available alternatives, and to think and choose with some degree of independence, while also understanding the consequences of their actions (Lansdown, 2005).

Further, children's right to participate is coherent with theories of development integrating personal change, contextual, representational, and regulation models (Sameroff, 2010; Sameroff & Fiese, 1990). In effect, children's individual characteristics and competences change over time, progressively evolving, while children become increasingly involved in a variety of social and cultural settings. For this reason, children's development becomes a product of the dynamic and active interactions they establish within these contexts (e.g., with peers and teachers), which allow them to develop social representations, to expand their self-regulation, and to be able to take responsibility for their own actions and wellbeing (Sameroff, 2009, 2010), experiencing progressive levels of responsibility (Rogoff, 2003). Relatedly, as children develop their competences, there is less need for protection and there is an increased capacity to participate in decision making processes affecting them (Lansdown, 2005).

Viewing child development as shaped by social systems and structures, and driven by proximal processes, is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework, which states the necessity to consider the interrelated concepts of process, person, context, and time, as well as the objective and subjective experiences of systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Applied to child participation, this ecological approach identifies children's ability to participate as an adaptable concept, and describes professionals' role as gatekeepers, the importance of a comprehensive regulatory regime, and participation as embedded in a socio-political landscape (Gal, 2017). Further, it considers interactions taking place between micro (i.e., participation depending on interactions with teachers), meso (i.e., consistency of professional skills, attitudes, and resources shaping children's ability to participate), exo (i.e., participation depending on how professional, social networks address it), and macro systems (i.e., participation shaped by society and by regulatory regimes), providing a multi-layered system of variables influencing child participation.

At the individual and interpersonal level, several socio-cognitive benefits have been proposed for children, for exerting their right to participate, including increases in self-esteem, self-efficacy, motivation, communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, and decision making skills (Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Kirby et al., 2003; Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010; Sinclair, 2004). Participation also offers opportunities for children from diverse backgrounds to build a sense of belonging, responsibility, caring, and sensitivity (Lansdown, 2005). Importantly, the promotion of children's right to participate provides the basis for other rights and for

citizenship, contributing to children's perceptions of being able to shape their environments (Covell, Howe, & McNeil, 2008). Thus, by balancing different rights, as a function of children's best interests (Kanyal, 2012), participation contributes for children's wellbeing (Casas, Bello, González, & Aligué, 2013; Hart & Brando, 2018; Tomás, 2008).

There is already evidence, for instance, on how the adoption of child-centred approaches benefits children (e.g., resulting in higher language and cognitive outcomes for children of low educated parents) (e.g., Bauchmüller, 2012; Hur, Buettner, & Jeon, 2015). Research has also suggested that higher levels of autonomy were associated with increased academic achievement, self-esteem, perceived competence, and individual control (Reeve, 2002). However, benefits from exerting participation, framed as a right, have been proposed merely at a conceptual level, and supporting evidence is still scarce. Furthermore, the exercise of children's right to participate is still considered a challenge, which might be due to different types of constraints (e.g., teachers' conceptions of participation, unwillingness to share power with children, cultural barriers) (Horwath et al., 2011). Nonetheless, potential benefits are also expected for ECE teachers, including increased respect for children's ideas, interests, and needs (Nah & Lee, 2016), and empowerment (Mannion, 2010). Similarly, improved organization and functioning of communities (Hart, 1992) is also expected, as well as the development of citizenship (Pascal & Bertram, 2009).

Despite the proposed benefits from exerting the right to participation, some obstacles might prevent its meaningful and effective implementation. Examples include lack of awareness on children's need for support and underestimation of their vulnerability, or misconception that children's participation requires that the final decision belongs to them (e.g., Bae, 2009; Kanyal & Gibbs, 2014; Lundy, 2007). Similarly, lack of consistency and continuity between different contexts, such as home and the ECE setting, where children spend most of their time awake, or difficulties in conciliating children's voices with conflicting demands for the adult (e.g., rigid curriculum to follow, management workload), might hinder children's participation. Further investigation of participation experiences taking place in fundamental microsystems, such as ECE, is therefore needed.

1.2.3. Educational perspective

From an educational perspective, it is pivotal to investigate interactional processes, as well as knowledge structures (i.e., conceptions, perceptions, expectations), behaviours, and practices influencing the promotion of children's right to participate (e.g., Koran & Avci,

2017). For instance, it is consensual that teacher-child relationships characterized by warmth, respect, mutual esteem, solidarity and recognition, implying consideration for children's voice, developing competences, are described as fostering children's participation (Salminen, 2013; Thomas, 2012). Moreover, ECE teachers' ideas about children's participation seem to influence their own purposes and practices towards the promotion of children right to participate (e.g., Niemi, 2019). These practices can be realised in diverse ways, such as documentation practices, councils, or the construction of learning environments (Kanyal, 2014), as well as through negotiation and dialogue (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007; Thomas, 2004).

Progressively, discussions about ECE settings' quality have been extended to include children's right to participate. Specifically, children's right to participate, and to influence decisions referring to them, has been described as key to ECE quality (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). Therefore, some authors suggest that assessments of the ECE settings' quality must include children's voices (Katz, 2006).

Research suggests that children attending high-quality education settings report more opportunities to participate and exert influence (Sheridan, 2007). Although pedagogical quality can be viewed in a variety of ways (Bairrão, 1998; Tobin, 2005), it broadly refers to a multidimensional concept, and aims at promoting children's wellbeing and positive development (Layzer & Goodson, 2006). A common distinction is made between structural and process quality (Barros et al., 2016; Pianta et al., 2005), with the former referring to aspects related to legislation, policy, and funding (e.g., group size, child-adult ratios), and the latter referring to proximal processes shaping children's everyday experiences (e.g., quality of teacher-child interactions occurring while the child is involved in play, activities, or routines) (Anders, 2015; Barros, et al., 2016; Slot, Lerkkanen, & Leseman, 2015).

Even though structural features are described as important preconditions for process quality, extant evidence on the relations between structural and process quality is still inconsistent (Slot, 2018). Nonetheless, it seems consensual that high-quality teacher-child interactions (i.e., process quality) are fundamental for fostering children's development and learning (e.g., Coplan & Prakash, 2003; Downer, Sabol, & Hamre, 2010). High-quality ECE settings are described as those in which children's rights, specifically children's right to participate, have been incorporated into practitioners' beliefs, discourse, and practices (Lansdown, 2006). In addition, to deliver high-quality practices, ECE practitioners need to recognize children as competent but also as needing adults' support and respect for the multiple ways in which they choose to express themselves (Kjørholt, 2008).

Regarding pedagogic approaches, different lenses might help understand participation in ECE. Diverse pedagogical models (e.g., HighScope, Reggio Emilia, Movimento Escola Moderna) value a pedagogy of participation as privileged means of fostering child development, highlighting children's active role, and their capacity to learn by doing and participating (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007). Also valued is the creation of pedagogical environments in which interactions and relationships sustain joint activities and projects that enable children to co-construct their own learning (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2012). This is consistent with a Pedagogy of Listening, which fosters the creation of a shared pedagogical space, where meaning and understanding are promoted by listening to the views of different actors (Rinaldi, 2001).

Furthermore, in ECE settings, understanding children's motivation is key to educate children to become self-directed and lifelong learners (Ryan & Deci, 2017). One of the most influential motivational theories, extensively applied to diverse fields including education, is self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This broad framework is particularly pertinent within the study of participation rights, also described as self-determination rights, as children are broadly recognized as self-determined, autonomous social actors, with evolving competences. Specifically, by exerting their right to be heard, children may satisfy their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and belonging.

In effect, if children's autonomy is respected and supported, they experience some control over their own life, becoming able to regulate actions and to feel competent (Noom, Deković, & Meeus, 2001). Motivated participation further requires a safe environment, where children receive support to experience opportunities to make choices and decisions, thus acquiring knowledge and competences that foster their self-determination (Ziemes & Gutzwiller-Helfenfiner, 2019). Moreover, self-determination refers to the combination of attitudes and competences allowing children to set goals for themselves, and to take the initiative to reach them.

Interestingly, when referring to their experiences of participation, children mention the possibility to express their own ideas, but also to experience a sense of belonging (Trevisan, 2016; Wyness, 2006), which is consistent with the self-determination need for relatedness and connectedness with others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). At the contextual level, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) also focuses on the needs and intentions of different intervenients (Williams & Deci, 1996), helping to analyse the dynamics of teacher-child interactions. This might be useful to understand, for instance, how teachers holding authority roles consider children's perspectives and participation in decision making (Reeve & Jang, 2006).

Further, previous studies suggested that teachers' practices guided by children's interests and decisions are associated with children's higher intrinsic motivation and wellbeing (e.g., Williams & Deci, 1996). This evidence has practical implications for ECE professionals' significant role in promoting participatory environments (Ziemes & Gutzwiller-Helfenfiner, 2019). Importantly, these participatory environments are largely influenced by the socio-cultural context.

1.2.4. Socio-cultural perspective

Given the vital role of social structures and culture on children's learning and development, children's right to participate must be analysed from a socio-cultural perspective, meaning that it should not be analysed as individual, linear or straightforward, but rather as socially-constructed (Komulainen, 2007). In fact, distinct approaches to children's participation have been described, arising from different world regions and cultures. For instance, collectivistic (e.g., focus on traditionally eastern, collective processes involving negotiation, recognition of the needs of the others, and collective decision making) and individualistic (e.g., focus on traditionally western, individualised self-governance, self-regulation, responsibility, and autonomy) approaches to children's rights have been described (Mason & Bolzan, 2010).

Likewise, research has documented the influence of cultural values and expectations on children's participation in the community, suggesting, for instance differences in boys' and girls' experiences and levels of participation (e.g., Engel-Yeger, Jarus, & Law, 2007; Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). Notably, extant literature addresses the importance of considering simultaneously intra-cultural and cross-cultural specificities (Dallmayr, 2002). Thus, aspects such as the socio-cultural context, the people with whom children interact, individual's perceptions, or cultural-historical traditions, must be equally considered, as they all shape children's experiences of participation (Rogoff, 2003; Spyrou, 2011).

Within this socio-cultural perspective, two important aspects help understand child participation: the *metaphor of apprenticeship*, referring to one's participation with others in culturally framed activities, and the concept of *guided participation*, referring to processes by which children make choices and learn through their participation, in interaction with adults and peers, guided by cultural and social values (Kanyal, 2014; Rogoff, 1995). Moreover, the fact that children develop through their engagement in activities, guided by cultural-historic frameworks and supported by adults, contributes for their participatory appropriation, a process

of becoming more active and critical (Rogoff, 1995). Also relevant is Vygotsky's (1986) socio-cultural perspective to reconceptualize the role of culture as part of proximal developmental processes, suggesting that children's social and cultural knowledge evolves as children actively engage with their environments.

Socially constructed, participation is influenced by practices, values, and behaviours imposed by family, community, and broader structures. Thus, children's and teachers' voices, as well as practices, need to be analysed as being shaped by social processes (Komulainen, 2007). Relatedly, participation contributes to build a sense of social justice (Hammack, 2018; Kanyal, 2014), and children learn about justice and fairness when standing up for themselves and participating in problem-solving, which can make a difference, even at younger ages. Interestingly, research has shown that children from an early age become aware of questions related to democracy and justice (e.g., Helwig, 1998, 2006), and are more willing to accept group decisions in which they have had a voice (Grocke, Rossano, & Tomasello, 2018; Lind & Tyler, 1988).

Further, the mediating processes between having a voice and an increased perception of legitimacy of the authority include feeling as a valuable group member, and feeling pride in the group (Lind & Tyler, 1988). Thus, socio-psychological research on perceived procedural justice suggests that participating and having voice is crucial to judgments of fairness (Folger, 1977), and is associated with increased perceived legitimacy of authorities, such as ECE teachers, and with feelings of inclusion in the group in which they are included (Emler & Reicher, 2005).

Creating the opportunity for children's right to be heard within education settings requires a significant cultural change at all levels of the educational system. It requires not only organisational or procedural adaptations, but changes in the fundamental relationships between adults and children. Importantly, pedagogical quality and participatory processes developing through interactions also need to take into account norms, values, traditions, cultural and contextual specificities, as well as the heritage of society (Sheridan, 2007). Lastly, participation has implications for society as a whole and, by participating, children exert influence over their own community, while also contributing to an increasing community awareness of this right (Lansdown, 2005).

1.2.5. Social policy perspective

Children constitute the human capital of a society. Therefore, promoting their development and wellbeing is considered an investment in the future (Bastos, 2016). This perspective is accepted by society at large, and particularly by the field of social policy, which plays an important role in recognising participation as an essential entitlement of children. Particularly, this field assures the establishment of links between international and national initiatives responsible for protecting children's participatory rights.

Within the international context, the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (League of Nations, 1924), based on the work of Korczac, forerunner of children's rights and advocate for children's self-determination (Lifton, 2006), constituted a historic document in recognising and affirming, for the first time, the existence of rights specific to children, as well as adults' responsibility towards them. Further, the Declaration on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1959) also constituted an important mark in stating children's rights to have a happy childhood, benefiting from a set of rights and freedoms, such as the rights to harmonious development and social protection. Nonetheless, none of these declarations addressed children's participation rights. In fact, participation was only recognised as a fundamental right and a general principle, by the CRC (United Nations General Assembly, 1989).

Within the CRC, Article 12 is particularly relevant, and it is linked to other articles of the United Nations CRC, such as Articles 3 (i.e., consideration of the best interests of the child) and 13 (i.e., right to freedom of expression). In addition, General Comment No. 7 draws attention to a rights-based approach in the early years, suggesting that the realization of child rights in early childhood should be monitored (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005). In turn, General Comment No. 12 (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009) reinforces children's right to be heard, referring to participation as including information sharing and dialogue between children and adults. Specifically, this comment describes participation as indispensable for the creation of a positive social climate in educational settings, and particularly in the classroom, stimulating cooperation and mutual support needed for child-centred interactive learning (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009).

Moreover, UNICEF has been decisive to the implementation of children's rights, and particularly to children's right to participate, framing it by concerns over children's needs, and resulting in strategies fostering children's holistic development (Kaufman & Rimini, 2009;

Such, 2014). For instance, the UNICEF's Child-Friendly Cities initiative aims to contribute to the realization of children's rights, mobilizing countries and municipalities to include children in various participatory processes, towards the construction of cities that respect children's' rights, and where their voice is heard and matters (UNICEF, 2004). Likewise, children's right to participate is one of the most important principles within the UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools initiative, which provides a framework for encouraging adults and school settings to create an environment conductive to participation (UNICEF, 2010).

At the European level, children's participation rights are described as the most difficult rights to implement, in part due to cultural aspects resulting from a tradition of silence, a lack of social participation, and power issues embedded in intergenerational relationships (Araújo & Fernandes, 2016). Nonetheless, in the last decades, discourses have consistently described participation as central for children to develop individual and social competences indispensable for their interactions and life in society, particularly in northern European countries, where participation is clearly stated as a core value within ECE policies and curricula (e.g., Heikkilä, Ihalainen, & Välimäki, 2004; Sheridan, 2007).

Using the definition of participation proposed by the United Nations CRC, the Council of Europe places children's right to participate at the core of children's rights agenda, considering it a key strategic objective to the promotion of children's rights, and a cross cutting approach (Council of Europe, 2012). The European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights (2000) aims to protect the best interests of children, proposing procedures to allow children to exercise their rights (i.e., either themselves, or through other persons or bodies). In addition, the right to be heard in all settings, including schools, communities, and the family context, at the national and the European level, has been recommended for all children under the age of 18 (Council of Europe, 2012). Finally, member states are encouraged to ensure the protection of children's right to participate, informing about participation, and creating spaces and conditions for participation (Council of Europe, 2017).

Similarly, is has been recommended that all member states of the European Union implement mechanisms towards the promotion of children's participation in all decision making processes affecting their lives, going beyond mere children's consultation, through capacity building for practitioners (European Commission, 2015). One of the most relevant and explicit initiatives refers to the adoption of the Recommendation to invest in children to break the cycle of disadvantage, which postulates the need to put in place mechanisms to foster children's participation in decision making affecting them, since the early ages (European Commission, 2013). Recent monitoring of this recommendation suggested lack of visibility

and awareness of participatory rights, with several gaps in participatory structures, in countries such as The Netherlands, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Northern Ireland, and Portugal (Eurochild, 2015).

Further, both the Proposal for Key Principles of a Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (European Commission, 2014) and the European Framework of Quality and Wellbeing Indicators (Moser, Leseman, Melhuish, Broekhuizen, & Slot, 2017) prioritize participation as a key principle of high-quality ECE. Both documents propose children's active, meaningful participation in the life of ECE settings, recognizing and valuing participation as key to achieve high-quality. Even more recently, the Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems stated that ECE settings need to be child-centred, based on children's participation and interest in learning, providing choice of activities and objects for learning, in safe, nurturing and caring environments, providing a range of possibilities for children to develop their potential (European Union, 2019). Still at the European level, a network of ECE associations and non-governmental organizations (e.g., Eurochild, European Early Childhood Education Research Association), which includes the Associação de Profissionais de Educação de Infância (i.e., the national Association of Early Childhood Education Professionais), established ten key principles in which services for children should base their work: from access to establishing partnerships, one of the principles refers to participation as an essential value allowing the expression of democracy and the promotion of inclusion, towards the construction of shared projects (Mussati, 2016).

Thus, in Europe, particular emphasis has been placed on policy initiatives, stressing the crucial role of participation rights for all children, targeting children's participation in education and other contexts, as well as professional training, and prioritizing the observance of children's rights and wellbeing, drawing implications into children's everyday life (Kanyal & Gibbs, 2014; Willow, 2010).

1.2.5.1. The Portuguese context

In Portugal, the CRC was ratified in 1990. Children's participation has been explicitly acknowledged in the recently revised Portuguese Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education (Lopes da Silva, Marques, Mata, & Rosa, 2016), which recognized children as subjects and agents of the educational process, and clearly stated the need to listen to children and to consider their perspectives, ensuring their participation in the decisions affecting their lives. Besides planning, deciding, and evaluating with children, the Portuguese Guidelines

address opportunities for ECE teachers to reflect on their practices to promote child participation.

In a recent study (Pedro, Peixoto, & Mata, 2015), children's voices and ideas about their preferred activities in Portuguese ECE settings were documented. Results suggested that not all children feel they have initiative or space to effectively do what they want to. Further, children's views suggest the need to promote family and community participation in their experiences in ECE.

Other legal documents, such as the Framework Law for Preschool Education, present as objectives of ECE the promotion of children's individual and social development, based on democratic experiences and citizenship education (Law No. 4/97). Further, the general profile of the ECE teachers in Portugal encourages them to promote democratic rules, and children's active involvement in learning processes and curriculum management (Decree-Law No. 240/2001). Similarly, the specific profile of ECE teachers recommends the promotion of children's active participation, for instance in the construction and implementation of shared rules, fostering collaborative practices and respectful solidarity, within the framework of democratic citizenship (Decree-Law No. 241/2001). Finally, students' profile when leaving compulsory education describes children's right to participate in educational contexts, acquiring values and skills that enable them to interact with others, making free and informed decisions, and having the capacity to participate in a civic, active, conscious, and responsible way, indispensable for exerting full, active, and creative citizenship (Legal Order No. 9311/2016).

Generally, the European and national policies and initiatives outlined above demonstrate the political will and the positive steps towards promoting children's right to participate in ECE. Nonetheless, despite previous research showing that high-quality education requires the adoption of a differentiated and constructivist pedagogy, and participatory spaces and practices promoted with and by children (e.g., Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007), little evidence exists about the way participation is implemented in ECE, globally and specifically in Portugal.

Despite the efforts that have been made, legal, political, and practical changes are needed to foster children's participation, anchored in children's agency and active role in society (Araújo & Fernandes, 2016). In effect, for children to fully exert their right to participate, mechanisms supporting participation need to be fully implemented. Moreover, raising awareness on children's rights is needed, considering the participation of children with different ages and conditions, from different contexts, in a child friendly way (Lansdown, 2010).

1.3. Current work: Relevance and purpose

Children's participation in various spheres of social life is becoming the norm in most countries across the world (Lansdown & Karkara, 2006). In effect, young children's right to participate is broadly recognized as beneficial for them, as well as for adults, and for the community in general (e.g., Horwath et al., 2011). Moreover, children's participation is key to develop a culture of human rights, and fundamental for ECE settings' quality. Therefore, young people's active participation in society must be protected and encouraged from an early age (Council of Europe, 2012). However, implementation of this right is still a challenge and empirical evidence is still scarce, with existing information arising mostly from a conceptual level.

This right has been the focus of research in different fields of knowledge, such as child protection and welfare (e.g., Cossar, Brandon, & Jordan, 2016; Magalhães, Calheiros, & Costa, 2016), the broader community (e.g., Kosher & Ben-Arieh, 2017), or education (e.g., Khoury-Kassabri & Ben-Arieh, 2009). Specifically, in Portugal, studies addressing children's right to participate in ECE have been conducted mostly within the fields of sociology (e.g., Sarmento, et al., 2007; Tomás, 2008) and educational sciences (e.g., Dias & Menezes, 2013; Freitas Luís, Andrade & Santos, 2015). Thus, advances are needed in understanding knowledge structures, processes, and outcomes associated with the implementation of children's right to participate in ECE. It is particularly important to further understand what are children's and ECE teachers' ideas about children's right to participate, as well as if, and how do teachers' ideas influence children's ideas.

Therefore, the relevance of this project relies on the need to bridge gaps between values and empirical evidence, building on different informants and mixed-methods (e.g., Creswell & Clark, 2007), and considering different levels of analysis, to provide a fuller understanding of children's right to participate in ECE (Vieira, 2017). By considering the social processes involved, such as teacher-child interactions, this crosscutting set of studies allows us to go beyond the individual level of child participation.

1.3.1. Main objectives and studies

In this work, we focus specifically on the participation of preschool-aged children, considering the importance of their everyday education settings (Melhuish, 2014), and the scarcity of studies addressing specifically this age group and the ECE context. In fact, there is

a gap in existing literature, as extant information and evidence mostly address the participation of older children (e.g., Bath, 2012; Ben-Arieh & Attar-Schwartz, 2013; Kirby & Bryson, 2002). Further, younger children are described as facing particular barriers in the realization of this right (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009), being one of the last age groups to access participation rights (Franklin, 2002). Therefore, it seems relevant to investigate children's right to participate in ECE, namely the knowledge structures, practices and processes involved in implementing this right.

Developed within the intersection between developmental psychology, educational psychology, and social policy, the main objectives of this set of studies are thus to:

a) Map research conducted specifically about children's right to participate in ECE, through a systematic review of the literature;

b) Develop measures to obtain reliable and valid data on children's right to participate in ECE, namely on children's ideas about their own right to participate in ECE, and on teachers' ideas and practices (i.e., perceived and observed) about children's right to participate;

c) Investigate children's and ECE teachers' ideas about children's right to participate;

d) Investigate associations between ECE teachers' and children's ideas about children's right to participate;

e) Analyse how ECE teachers' ideas, practices to promote participation, and classroom process quality, are associated with children's ideas.

Ultimately, we aim to inform researchers, professionals, and policy makers about the conditions needed to promote children's participation in ECE, guiding and sensitizing the ECE community, and society in general, about the importance of this right.

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CHAPTER II | WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY: CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN ECE: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW[1]

Abstract

Children's right to participate is considered pivotal for establishing a culture of democracy and citizenship. Although this is not a new concept, its application remains a challenge. This review aims to map peer-reviewed empirical research conducted on children's right to participate, in centre-based early childhood education settings, from 1980 on. A systematic literature search was performed and 36 studies met the inclusion criteria. Findings suggest a limited number of publications, conducted mostly in northern Europe countries, in the education field. Regarding definitions and theoretical backgrounds, sociological, legal, democratic, and educational discourses converge. There is a prominence of qualitative studies, a greater focus of research on ideas about participation, and, to a lesser extent, a focus on practices to promote participation. There is more emphasis on teacher's perspectives and practices, with few studies relying on children as informants, and limited sound measures to assess children's participation. Future research should rely on multiple informants, and investigate associations between this right and children's individual outcomes.

Keywords: Right to participate, Participation, Early childhood education, Peer-reviewed, Children.

1. Introduction

Children's rights address the social and legal positions of children in society. The rights of young people are embedded in a culture of human rights, democracy, and rule of law, which together require the establishment of policies enabling young people to fulfil their potential and actively participate in society. Moreover, young people's active and effective participation and decision making in society must be both protected and encouraged from an early age (Council of Europe, 2017; United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005).

The United Nations organization has been pivotal in the implementation of children's rights and in raising awareness of children's role in society. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989 and ratified almost universally, is the most comprehensive document on the rights of children. The articles of the convention define a range of provision, protection, and participation rights for children (Alderson, 2000; Lansdown, 1994). Participation rights are mostly expressed in Articles 12 and 13. Specifically, Article 12 states

that children have the right to participate in all matters affecting them, from family to community, freely expressing their opinion and having it respected and considered. Several amendments to the CRC have been made with regard to specific national legislations. More recently, specific guidelines for the implementation of children's right to participate have been proposed (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005).

The European Commission (2013) has recommended that all member states develop integrated strategies, taking children's best interests as a primary consideration and recognizing children as independent rights-holders. One key pillar for such policies involves implementing mechanisms to promote children's participation in decision making processes affecting their lives.

Over time, different research fields became gradually more interested in children's rights. Sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and academics from other disciplines have contributed to the field, discussing concepts, asking questions, sharing concerns regarding children's rights, recognizing children's competence and agency, and valuing their perspectives (e.g., Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2005; Pascal & Bertram, 2009; Shaik & Ebrahim, 2015).

1.1. Conceptualizing the right to participate

Several definitions of children's right to participate have been proposed. Because participation is defined as children's influence in all matters affecting them, it is necessarily multidimensional and can be exercised in different ways (Clark, 2005; Shier, 2001; Sinclair, 2004; Smith, 2002; Stephenson, Gourley, & Miles, 2004; Tomanovic, 2003). Understanding children's participation involves considering dimensions such as the level of participation, that is, the degree of power sharing between teacher and child; the decisions and focus of decision making affecting children; the nature of the activity, namely participation in one-off or long-term processes; and the children involved, covering a wide range of interests, capacities, and characteristics (Sinclair, 2004).

The degree to which children should have a voice has been a subject of discussion (e.g., Sinclair, 2004). Issues of power, voice, and representation have been essential when discussing children's participation in social and political life (e.g., Farrugia, 2015; Lansdown, 1995) as they challenge the cultural notions and social representations of "adult" and "child" (e.g., Alderson, 2000).

Moreover, distinct levels of participation involving different degrees of power sharing (e.g., children being informed, consulted, or sharing decisions with adults) between children and adults have been proposed (Arnstein's, 1969; Hart, 1992; Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin, & Sinclair, 2003; Shier, 2001; Treseder, 1997). One of the most influential models of participation suggested the existence of eight levels of participation, three of which referred to experiences of non-participation (Hart, 1992). Subsequent models proposed a non-hierarchical structure of participation (Treseder, 1997) or clarified different degrees of commitment to the process of empowerment, at each level (Shier, 2001).

Existing participation models differ in the extent of children's initiative considered at higher levels of the participation hierarchy. For instance, Hart (1992) described participation from manipulation by adults to decision making initiated by children and shared with adults, while Shier (2001) only described participation from being listened to, to being involved in decision making. Existing models also differ in the extent to which they propose a hierarchy of participation levels.

Thomas (2012) emphasized the importance of the theory of recognition to understanding children's participation. Proposed by Honneth (1995), this theory is founded in the concept of recognition as a fundamental element in human interaction, relevant for individual and group identity. Thomas refers to recognition as the key to individual development and social progress, highlighting three different modes that can support our thinking about children's place and participation in society – love, rights, and solidarity. Love refers to children's participation in intimate relationships, early on and throughout life, contributing to a sense of being valued and trusted. Rights are based on the respect for other people as human beings, and solidarity refers to individual contributions to collective values.

Recently, inspired by Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach, Gal (2017) proposed salient themes emerging from existing literature on children's right to participate and reorganized them into an ecological model of child and youth participation (see Figure 1). Specifically, relevant themes include children's ability to participate and professionals' role as gatekeepers. Together with children's competence and confidence to engage with others, professionals' perceptions, motivation, and capabilities are described as significant factors contributing to child participation. Furthermore, the model considers children's ability to meaningfully participate in different ecological levels, such as the family, the neighbourhood, or the school. In fact, there is a wide range of spheres in which children may participate: from family daily interactions or negotiations between parents and children, to teacher-child

interactions and participation in school councils and elections, and neighbourhood planning, where children interact with authority figures.

Young children's voices should be heard and respected to ensure their perceptions, concerns, needs, and dreams are considered in decisions regarding their education and everyday lives. Nonetheless, there are some barriers to the meaningful and effective implementation of the right to participate within education settings, including a general lack of awareness of children's right to participate, adults' scepticism about children's capacity to participate, and concerns that empowering children will weaken teachers' authority (Lundy, 2007).
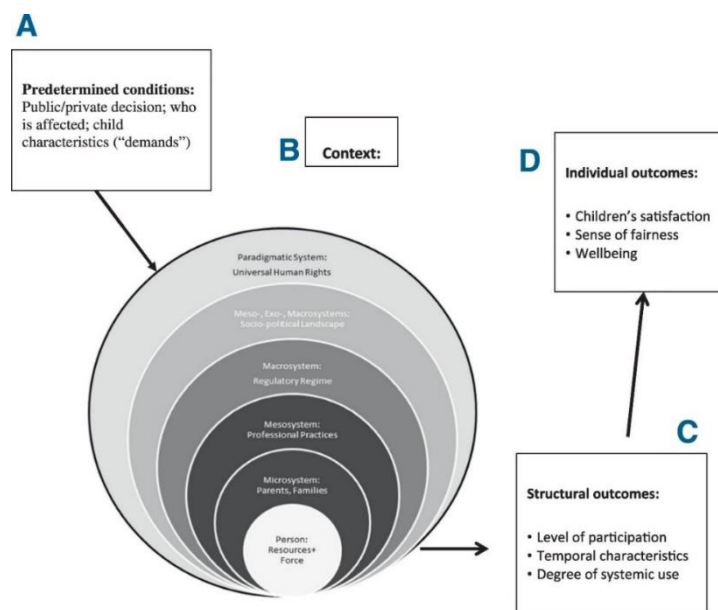
Figure 1. Ecological model of child and youth participation (Gal, 2017). Reproduced with author's permission.

1.2. The right to participate in early childhood education settings

Within the early childhood education (ECE) field there is general consensus regarding the importance of considering children's perspectives (see Clark & Moss, 2005). For example, Katz (2006) suggested that assessment of ECE quality should consider multiple perspectives, including children's views and experiences. Furthermore, it is consensual that children's rights and, specifically, children's right to participate constitute key aspects in framing ECE daily practice and overall quality (Sheridan, 2007; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001).

There is growing interest in addressing how adults working with young children can support shared decision making processes in which children are actively engaged (NAYEC,

2009). Relatedly, there have been efforts to develop high-quality standards aiming to guide ECE professionals in improving participatory practices and ensuring meaningful participation for children (e.g., Save the Children, 2005). The importance of recognizing children as active and capable learners, addressing their interests and needs to promote their wellbeing, positive self-image, physical, social, and cognitive development is among the key principles of a quality framework for ECE (European Commission, 2014). Recently, a comprehensive set of indicators were designed to establish a common framework for the quality of ECE in Europe, addressing the importance of promoting child participation (Moser, Leseman, Melhuish, Broekhuizen, & Slot, 2017). Specifically, the authors propose that ECE teachers must show high regard for children's perspectives, adopting a child-centred approach, by facilitating children's initiative and decision making in play and other activities, and following children's lead.

1.3. Potential effects of the right to participate

Participation improves the organization and functioning of communities and enables individuals to develop into more competent and confident members of society, through increases in social competence, social responsibility, and political self-determination (Hart, 1992). Relatedly, two types of outcomes of exerting the right to participate are proposed: general benefits, such as better government decisions and policies, and benefits to children, such as achievement of specific objectives, development of leadership skills, self-esteem, and wellbeing (Save the Children, 2010). The development of citizenship has also been proposed as an outcome of child participation (Pascal & Bertram, 2009).

In parallel with the growing recognition of children's right to participate, there has been increasing interest in children's wellbeing (e.g., Bradshaw & Mayhew, 2005). The CRC states that participation is a mechanism for promoting wellbeing and full development (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). To be heard, to influence decision making, and to exercise voice, are described as fundamental wellbeing outcomes (Cleaver & Cockburn, 2009). Relatedly, potential outcomes of children's participation comprise increased access to decision making, influence, advocacy, and voice, which can also lead to improved development outcomes (Gero & Asker, 2012).

1.4. Existing reviews on the right to participate

Reviews have already been conducted on the topic. A review of the international literature mapping academic discourse on children's rights identified autonomy and participation rights as the new standard in practice and policy, and a predominant theme in the academic work on the CRC (Reynaert, Bouverne-de-Bie, & Vandevelde, 2009).

In the educational context, methods for listening to and consulting with young children in ECE settings have been reviewed (Clark, 2005). Further, another literature review has focused on how school-aged children's participation in formal and non-formal school programs can be instrumental in enhancing development outcomes and informing program design, thus increasing efficacy (Gero & Asker, 2012). In addition, Theobald, Danby, and Ailwood (2011) reviewed social policy movements and theoretical understandings of children's participation specifically in Australian ECE settings.

In the context of health services, Coyne (2008) reviewed the literature on children's participation in appointments and decision making in health services, highlighting professionals' and parents' reservations and concerns about children's active involvement. Likewise, a scoping review of children's participation in planning and decision making in Norway's protection and health services is also available (Vis, Strandbu, Holtan, and Thomas, 2010).

Evidence on children and young people's perspectives on the methods used by adults to obtain their views has also been reviewed (Hill, 2006). Finally, Campos and Fernandes (2012) mapped PhD thesis and Master dissertations discussing issues of children's participation in different life contexts in the field of sociology of childhood alone, in a specific Portuguese university.

1.5. This review

Extant reviews have focused on specific methods to gather children's voices, children's participation in specific countries, children's participation in health settings, or school-aged children's participation. To the best of our knowledge, there is currently no systematic review mapping international empirical research on young children's right to participate in ECE settings. We aim to address this gap, acknowledging the importance of the early years, often underestimated and overlooked. We acknowledge the initial assumptions most likely to influence our analyses and interpretation of findings: (1) the field needs a comprehensive

evidence-base on participation-related ideas, practices, and outcomes, and their mutual associations and effects; (2) the field needs strong evidence building on quantitative and qualitative studies and transversal and longitudinal high-quality research designs; (3) the field needs to consider the perspectives, experiences, and outcomes of multiple agents, maintaining a strong focus on children.

Focusing on empirical articles published in peer-reviewed journals from 1980 to 2017, we aim to (a) describe the contexts in which children's participation in ECE has been studied; (b) identify the main definitions and theoretical backgrounds currently framing the study of children's right to participate; (c) understand whose voices and experiences are being heard or described; (d) map the methodological approaches and research designs used for studying children's right to participate; and (e) understand the extent to which the effects of children's right to participate are considered in available empirical peer-reviewed studies. Our ultimate goal is to provide scholars, policy makers, and practitioners with a synthesis of the existing empirical studies in the field, allowing for a deeper understanding of state of the art and informing about possible pathways to move the field forward.

2. Method

2.1. Eligibility criteria

We conducted a systematic review of peer-reviewed empirical studies addressing children's right to participate in ECE settings. We used the SPIDER tool (Sample, Phenomenon of Interest, Design, Evaluation, and Research type; Cooke, Smith, & Booth, 2012) to define a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies meeting the following inclusion criteria were considered for review (i.e., full-text reading and analysis):

(i) Sample: Empirical studies focusing on typically developing children aged 3 to 6 years-old, including studies focusing on teachers and other professionals' ideas (i.e., values, beliefs, conceptions, expectations, or perceptions) about children's right to participate in ECE settings, and taking place in ECE center-based settings;

(ii) Phenomenon of interest: Empirical studies addressing children's right to participate, understood as the right to choose, to have an active voice, to have their opinion considered; also, studies addressing specific behaviours, decisions, or individual experiences related to the right to participate;

(iii) Design: Any type of study design (e.g., correlational, longitudinal, randomized control trials), intervention, or method involving primary data collection and analysis;

(iv) Evaluation: Any type of outcome, such as ideas, practices, strategies, or benefits of participation;

(v) Research type: Any type of empirical research, involving qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods.

Regarding exclusion criteria, studies were not considered for this review if they referred to children aged below 3 or above 6 years, based on the focus of the broader research project underlying this review and because the inclusion of children aged below 3 would require a different focus of analysis. However, studies involving multiple ages that reported results for preschool-aged children were eligible. Moreover, studies were excluded if they referred to contexts other than centre-based ECE, such as family child care or sports. We also did not include studies addressing physical participation, involvement in physical activities, or referring to participatory approaches aimed at studying other topics rather than children's right to participate. Similarly, studies referring to participation as the right to attend ECE were not considered. Studies referring to children with special needs or parental participation were excluded, as they were not the focus of the research project that originated this review. Articles that did not report empirical studies (e.g., editor letters, reviews, position statements, and theoretical papers) and meta-analysis were also not selected for review. Finally, we excluded studies in languages other than English or Portuguese, studies published in non-peer-reviewed journals, or unpublished research (e.g., PhD or Master Dissertations).

2.2. Information sources and search strategy

A systematic electronic search was conducted in the EBSCO databases Academic Search Complete, PsycARTICLES, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, PsycINFO, and ERIC; Web of Science Core Collection and Scopus (both with interdisciplinary coverage, including law-related areas), equally applying specific restrictions in all databases: (a) published between 1980 and 2017, (b) containing selected keywords in the abstract, (c) with full text available, (d) published in academic journals, and (e) in the English and Portuguese languages. The lower temporal limit was defined trying to cover all publications since 1980, a

few years before the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in 1989.

Studies were identified using all possible combinations of the following groups of search terms: (a) "child* participation" OR "participat* right" OR "right to participat*" OR "right for participat*" AND (b) "preschool*" OR "early childhood education*" OR "pre-k" OR "kindergarten*" OR "3 year* old*" OR "4 year* old*" OR "5 year* old*" OR "three year* old*" OR "four year* old*" OR "five year* old*" OR "age* 3" OR "age* 4" OR "age* 5" OR "early education" OR "daycare" OR "day care" OR "childcare" OR "child care" NOT (equivalent AND NOT in Scopus) (c) "disabilit*" OR "special need*" OR "special education need*" OR "handicap*" OR "impairment*".

A hand search based on known authors, reference lists of previous reviews of literature, and already known papers was also performed to include relevant empirical papers meeting the search criteria that had not been captured by the electronic search. To refine and expand the hand search, we conducted a legacy search, by using the reference lists of all articles included in the review. All duplicate studies were verified, both electronically and manually, and eliminated. Search procedures were first conducted on July and updated in December 2017.

2.3. Study selection and data extraction

A selection of relevant studies was conducted, based on a sequential examination of title, abstract, and full text, following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) Statement (Liberati et al., 2009). The first part of the selection, title and abstract examination, followed by decision to retain or reject each study, was made by two independent coders separately, using the Abstrackr online tool (Wallace, Small, Brodley, Lau, & Trikalinos, 2012). Each of the coders screened all the articles identified, reaching 88.8 percentage agreement. All disagreements were reviewed in committee, mostly referring to non-empirical studies or studies not referring to preschool-aged children. The next step, full text examination and decision to retain or reject each study, was again conducted by two independent coders separately, reaching 85.9 percent agreement, and subsequently solving discrepant decisions through consensus.

2.4. Retrieval and selection of studies

As illustrated in Figure 2, the initial screening resulted in the retrieval of 525 articles. This number fell to 243 after removal of duplicates. Of these, 207 studies were excluded based on their title and abstract, because they did not meet at least one of the inclusion criteria. The remaining 36 articles, together with 28 articles identified through hand search, resulting in a total of 64 articles, were screened through full-text reading, with 28 more articles excluded for not meeting at least one inclusion criterion. Disagreements, reviewed in committee, mostly referred to studies using participatory approaches, but addressing other topics or other contexts such as children's voices in nurseries, or children's voices on teacher's roles. In the end, 36 studies, 22 from database search and 14 from hand search, met the inclusion criteria and were selected for qualitative synthesis.

Identification

Records identified through database searching: EBSCO (Academic Search Complete, ERIC, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection), Scopus and Web of Science ($n = 525$)

Additional records identified through other sources ($n = 28$)

Screening

Records after duplicates removed ($n = 243$)

Records screened ($n = 243$) *[88.8% Agreement]*

Records excluded based on title and abstract ($n = 207$)

Eligibility

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (36 from databases + 28 other sources) ($n = 64$) *[85.9% Agreement]*

Full-text articles excluded ($n = 28$)

Motives:
- Not empirical (6)
- Not specifically addressing children's right to participate (e.g., social participation; participatory approaches addressing other topics) (18)
- Not selected age/preschool context (4)

Inclusion

Studies included in qualitative synthesis ($n = 36$)

Figure 2. Results of search strategy based on the PRISMA Statement (Liberati et. al, 2009).

3. Results

Detailed information extracted from the full-text review is presented in Table 1. A qualitative analysis of extracted information was conducted, aiming to identify and categorize study characteristics, in an essentially data-driven process (Schreier, 2014). Categories addressed topics such as the context of research (i.e., country and field in which the research was conducted), definitions, voices heard (i.e., sources of information), methodological approaches, and focus of the research.

Table 1
Summary of reviewed studies

No.	Authors/year	Country	Field	Definition	Source of information	Type of methods	Focus
1	Alasuutari (2014)	Finland	Education	Legal and Sociological	Teacher and Parents	Qualitative	Practices
2	Ärlemalm–Hagsér (2013)	Sweden	Education	Legal	Document	Qualitative	Legal documentation
3	Batur Musaoglu, and Haktanir (2012)	Turkey	Education	Legal and Sociological	Document	Qualitative	Legal documentation
4	Broström et al. (2015)	Australia, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, and Sweden	Education	Sociological	Teacher	Quantitative	Ideas
5	Correia and Aguiar (2017)	Portugal	Psychology	Legal and Sociological	Child	Qualitative	Ideas
6	De Freitas Luís, Andrade, Coelho, and Santos (2015)	Portugal	Education	Sociological and Involvement	Teacher and Child	Qualitative	Practices and Outcomes
7	Dias and Menezes (2013)	Portugal	Education	Sociological	Teacher and Child	Qualitative	Ideas
8	Harcourt and Hägglund (2013)	Australia and Sweden	Education	Legal	Child	Qualitative	Ideas
9	Houen, Danby, Farrel, and Thorpe (2016)	Australia	Education	Legal and Sociological	Teacher and Child	Qualitative	Practices
10	Johansson and Sandberg (2010)	Sweden	Education	Sociological	Teacher	Qualitative	Ideas
11	Kangas, Ojala, and Venninen (2015)	Finland	Education	Legal and Sociological	Teacher	Mixed Methods	Ideas and Outcomes
12	Kangas, Venninen, and Ojala (2016)	Finland	Education	Legal and Sociological	Teacher	Mixed Methods	Ideas

13	Knauf (2017)	Germany	Social Welfare	Legal and Democratic	Document, Teacher and Child	Qualitative	Practices
14	Koran and Avci (2017)	Cyprus	Education	Legal and Sociological	Teacher	Qualitative	Ideas
15	Leinonen and Venninen (2012)	Finland	Education	Legal and Sociological	Teacher	Mixed Methods	Ideas
16	Leinonen, Brotherus, and Venninen, (2014)	Finland	Education	Legal and Sociological	Document and Teacher	Qualitative	Ideas and Legal documentation
17	Lopes, Correia, and Aguiar (2016)	Portugal	Psychology	Legal and Sociological	Teacher	Quantitative	Ideas
18	Markstrom and Hallden (2009)	Sweden	Education	Sociological	Child	Qualitative	Practices
19	Mashford-Scott and Church (2011)	Australia	Education	Legal and Sociological	Teacher and Child	Qualitative	Practices
20	Mesquita-Pires (2012)	Portugal	Education	Sociological	Teacher and Child	Qualitative	Practices and Outcomes
21	Nah and Lee (2016)	South Korea	Education	Legal, Sociological and Democratic	Teacher and Child	Qualitative	Ideas, Practices and Outcomes
22	Pettersson(2015)	Sweden	Social Welfare	Legal and Sociological	Document, Teacher and Child	Qualitative	Practices
23	Salminen (2013)	Finland	Education	Sociological	Teacher	Qualitative	Practices
24	Sandberg and Eriksson (2010)	Sweden	Education	Involvement and Democratic	Teacher	Mixed Methods	Ideas
25	Sandseter and Seland (2016)	Norway	Education	Legal and Sociological	Child	Quantitative	Ideas and Outcomes
26	Shaik and Ebrahim (2015)	South Africa	Education	Legal and Sociological	Child	Qualitative	Practices
27	Sheridan and Samuelson (2001)	Sweden	Education	Legal and Democratic	Child	Qualitative	Ideas and Practices
28	Synodi (2014)	Greece	Education	Legal	Document	Qualitative	Legal documentation
29	Theobald and Kultti (2012)	Australia and Sweden	Education	Legal and Sociological	Teacher and Child	Qualitative	Practices

30	Tholin and Jansen (2012)	Norway	Education	Legal and Democratic	Teacher and Child	Qualitative	Practices
31	Thornberg and Elvstrand (2012)	Sweden	Education	Legal, Sociological and Democratic	Teacher and Child	Qualitative	Ideas and Practices
32	Turnšek (2008)	Slovenia	Education	Sociological, Involvement, and Democratic	Teacher	Quantitative	Ideas
33	Turnšek and Pekkarinen (2009)	Slovenia and Finland	Education	Democratic and Involvement	Teacher	Quantitative	Ideas
34	Venninen and Leinonen, (2013)	Finland	Education	Legal and Sociological	Teacher	Mixed Methods	Ideas
35	Venninen, Leinonen, Lipponen and Ojala (2014)	Finland	Education	Sociological	Teacher	Quantitative	Ideas
36	Zorec (2015)	Slovenia	Education	Legal and Sociological and Involvement	Teacher	Quantitative	Ideas

3.1. Contexts of research

The 36 studies included in the systematic review were published between 2001 and 2017, although most ($n = 29$, 81%) were published between 2012 and 2017. A considerable number of studies were conducted in Finland ($n = 8$, 22%) and in Sweden ($n = 7$, 19%), exclusively. Four studies included in this review (Broström et al., 2015; Harcourt & Hägglund, 2013; Theobald & Kultti, 2012; Turnšek & Pekkarinen, 2009) were conducted in more than one country, always including Sweden.

Five studies (Kangas, Ojala, & Venninen, 2015; Leinonen & Venninen, 2012; Leinonen, Brotherus, & Venninen, 2014; Venninen & Leinonen, 2013; Venninen, Leinonen, Lipponen, & Ojala, 2014) relied on data from the "Katse lapseen-hanke VKK-Metro" project (i.e., "Looking at a child" project), from the Early Childhood Education Development Unit of the Helsinki metropolitan area, in Finland, but all were considered, as distinct sample sizes and objectives were reported.

The 36 articles were published in 28 journals, with the European Early Childhood Education Research Journal publishing the most studies ($n = 5$, 18%). Most journals were dedicated (i.e., aims and scope) to education ($n = 18$, 64%), while the remaining were mostly dedicated to multidisciplinary fields (e.g., research practice, childhood related fields), and one was dedicated to psychology. Regarding journal's indexation areas in SCImago (2017), many journals ($n = 16$, 57%) were indexed in Education and/or Developmental and Educational Psychology. Moreover, authors' field of study, as reflected in academic affiliations, in most articles ($n = 32$, 89%) was education; few articles were written by authors dedicated to psychology ($n = 2$, 6%) or social and welfare studies ($n = 2$, 6%). Based on the SCImago journal rankings (2017), only one article (3%) was published in a first-quartile journal (indexed in 'Education'), while the majority ($n = 22$, 61%) were published in second and third-quartile journals.

3.2. Definitions and theoretical background

Authors relied on different theoretical frameworks and paradigms when defining the right to participate: to have a voice and to be listened to, to have competence and agency, to be involved, and to experience democratic citizenship. The four theoretical frameworks are described below.

3.2.1. To have a voice and to be listened to

Several studies ($n = 25$, 69%) defined the right to participate based on a legal paradigm, specifically referring to the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), which affords children's legal rights to decision making on all matters that affect them. Participation is thus seen as children's entitlement to freely express their opinion, being listened to, and having that opinion respected and taken into consideration. Over one third of the studies ($n = 13$, 36%) specifically mentioned Articles 12 and/or 13 of the Convention. Not surprisingly, few studies ($n = 3$, 8%) used this paradigm alone to define the right to participate, with most studies ($n = 22$, 62%) defining participation in combination with other paradigms. Some studies ($n = 14$, 39%) also focused on existing national legal commitments (e.g., national laws/decrees, official curriculums) to the right to participate.

3.2.2. To have competence and agency

Most studies ($n = 28$, 78%) relied on a sociological paradigm based on children as competent actors and active agents. The right to participate is thus conceptualized in the light of a new vision of childhood which considers children as having rights, as agents in their own social worlds, and as competent to use resources to co-construct interactions and make their own choices. Studies using this definition generally cited Prout and James (1997) or Corsaro (2005). While some articles ($n = 7$, 19%) used this approach alone to define children's right to participate, the majority ($n = 16$, 44%) used it in combination with the legal perspective. Some studies combined this sociological paradigm and other perspectives (e.g., involvement, democratic) ($n = 5$, 14%).

3.3.3. To be involved

Some studies ($n = 5$, 14%) defined the right to participate as individual involvement in a life situation (e.g., taking part, being involved). This perspective considers that the right to participate consists of both involvement and decision making. This approach translates into being involved in planning everyday activities, belonging to the group, and feeling included when solving a problem. A few studies ($n = 3$, 8%) referred to children's involvement according to the experiential paradigm proposed by Laevers (2005), considering children's involvement (i.e., concentration, fascination, and intensity of engagement) as a process variable that reflects the degree to which children's rights are met (Laevers & Declercq, 2018). One

study (3%) considered participation as involvement from a health and functional perspective, mentioning the World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning (2007). Two of the five studies also referred to participation as involvement according to the definition of Turnšek (2005, 2007), describing it as children's involvement in creating their life in the institution and making decisions about aspects concerning them. All studies using this definition combined it with definitions based on the sociological perspective ($n = 1$, 3%), the democratic perspective ($n = 2$, 6%), or combined more than two perspectives ($n = 2$, 6%).

3.3.4. To Experience democratic citizenship

A democratic perspective was identified in eight studies (22%), defining the right to participate as a key concept of democratic cultures and pedagogies. This definition emphasizes children as active and democratic citizens, who learn to defend their interests and take on responsibilities. This is in line with the *philosophy* of education paradigm and the theory of democracy proposed by Dewey (1916), based on the direct participation of all society members, and on education as the way individuals experience participation and, therefore, democracy. All studies using this definition of children's right to participate combined it other perspectives (e.g., defining participation based on the democratic and involvement perspectives).

3.3. Voices heard and experiences documented

Regarding sources of information, 14 studies (39%) included teachers as participants, six studies (17%) included children only, nine studies (25%) included both teachers and children, and one study (3%) had teachers and parents as participants. Three studies (8%) collected data through legal document analysis. One study (3%) used both legal documents and teachers as sources of information and two (6%) combined the analysis of documentation practices with teachers and children as informants. As expected, all studies involved preschool-aged children.

3.4. Approaches

Regarding the type of methods used, most articles ($n = 24$, 67%) reported qualitative research, and few reported quantitative research ($n = 7$, 19%) or mixed methods ($n = 5$, 14%). Within qualitative studies, seven used a combination of data collection methods such as

observations, interviews, visual data (e.g., photographic records, children's drawings), and conversations; five studies involved analysis of documentation practices, ECE teachers' behaviors, social interactions, etc.; five studies conducted conversation analysis; three studies involved document analysis, and the remaining studies used a focus group discussion, a critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954), a structured interview, or a combination of document analysis and survey.

All quantitative studies involved the use of self-report questionnaires. Fewer than half (Lopes, Correia, & Aguiar, 2016; Venninen et al., 2014; Zorec, 2015) provided information regarding the psychometric properties of the measures used. One study (Zorec, 2015) analysed the effects of a teachers' training program, comparing two data collection points.

3.5. Focus of the research on children's right to participate

A synthesis of main results regarding the focus of studies on children's right to participate in ECE can be found in Figure 3.

LEGAL DOCUMENTATION	**IDEAS**	**PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES**	**OUTCOMES**
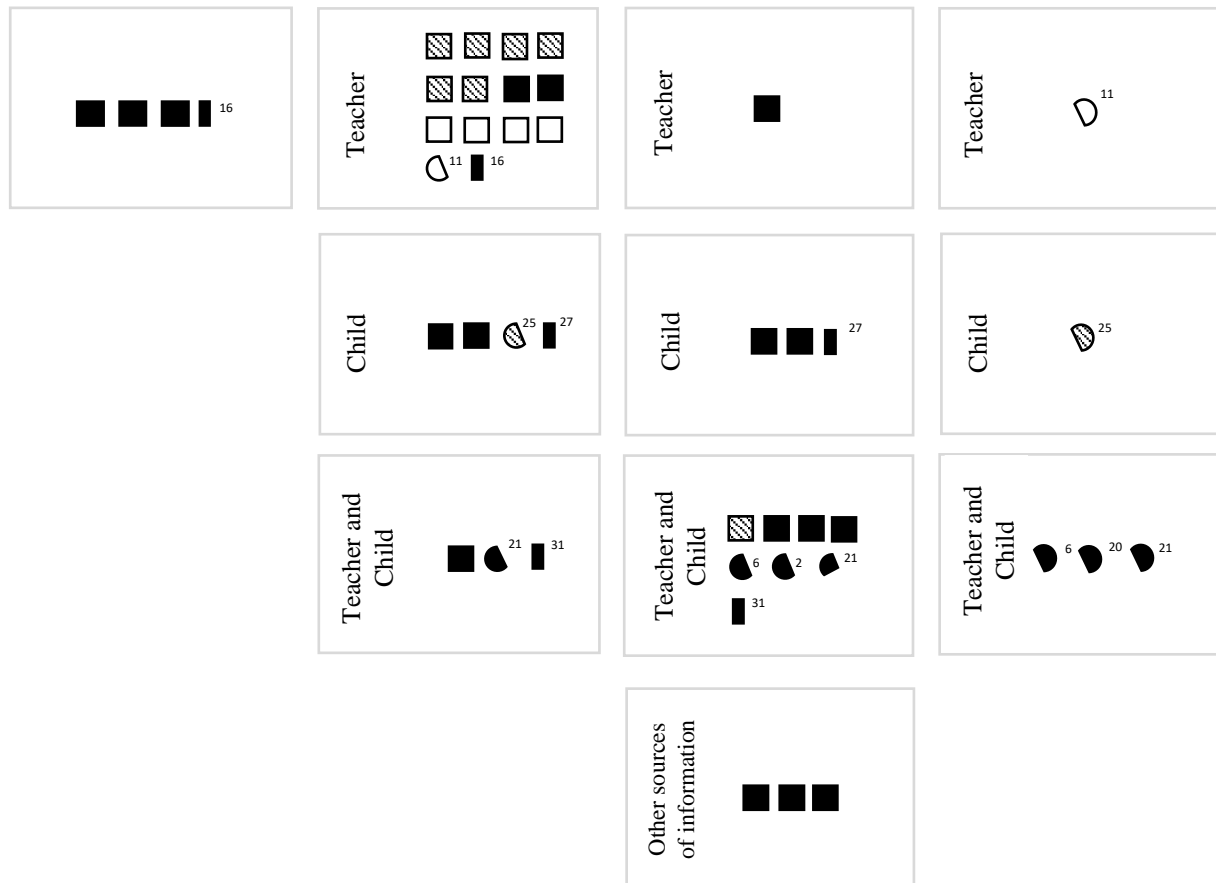
Qualitative study

Quantitative study

Mixed methods study

Single study including different sources of information and/or focus of the research

Single study including associations with child and/or teacher outcomes

Note: Numbers in the figure refer to numbering of studies, as presented in Table 1

Figure 3. Synthesis of focus of the research on children's right to participate

3.5.1. Ideas about participation

Almost half the studies ($n = 17$, 47%) investigated ideas about participation, focusing on teachers' ($n = 13$, 36%), children's ($n = 3$, 8%), or both teachers' and children's ideas ($n = 1$, 3%). It is noteworthy that the number of studies focusing on teachers' ideas is four times the number of studies focusing on children's ideas.

Regarding teachers' ideas, some studies focused on teachers' conceptions about the meaning of participation. ECE teachers seem to conceive participation as being part of a group and listening to others (e.g., Johansson & Sandberg, 2010), as participating in planning and decision making (Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010; Turnšek, 2008), or as children's own activity and independent choice, supported by teachers (Broström et al., 2015).

We also found studies focusing on teachers' ideas about practices aiming to promote children's right to participate. Good practices reported by teachers include: supporting child participation in both child-initiated and adult-initiated activities, by promoting opportunities for discussion and negotiation in decision making, within shared experiences and rules (Kangas et al., 2015; Kangas, Venninen, & Ojala, 2016; Lopes, Correia, & Aguiar, 2016; Turnšek & Pekkarinen, 2009; Venninen & Leinonen, 2013, Zorec, 2015); facilitating professional skills for supporting children's perspectives (Kangas, et. al, 2016); and enabling a participation environment characterized by pedagogical sensitivity and respect for children's will to participate (Kangas et. al, 2016; Koran & Avci, 2017). However, teachers also identified obstacles to the implementation of children's participation, namely the use of a commanding and directing language and communication style (Koran & Avci, 2017), the existence of educational structures characterized by traditional interaction patterns based on teacher power and child subordination (Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012), challenging adult-child ratios and management (Venninen et al., 2014).

One study documented teachers' ideas before and after being exposed to a two-year intensive training program focused on the pedagogical principles of the Reggio Emilia approach, which emphasizes child participation (Zorec, 2015).

The three studies focusing on children's ideas mostly investigated how children perceive their right to participate. Children seem to describe participatory classrooms as those they like the most and in which they have more opportunities to make choices, feel better, and have fun (Correia & Aguiar, 2017). Also, children describe the right to participate as being linked with action and embedded in the relationships established with others, in accordance to their own needs (Harcourt & Hägglund, 2013). Participation is also perceived by children as

the opportunity to freely engage with and use different areas and materials without having to ask for permission from the ECE staff, as well as the opportunity to participate in decisions about what activities they should engage, with the possibility of refusing staff proposals (Sandseter & Seland, 2016).

The study analysing both teachers' and children's ideas about participation mostly investigated and categorized their perspectives about participation practices and experiences. Children seem consider citizenship-related topics, describing participation as managing group relations and participating in discussions and negotiations, while teachers highlight the complementary role of citizenship education, perceiving educational settings as major agents of socialization (Dias & Menezes, 2013).

2.5.2. Practices and strategies related to participation

One third of the studies ($n = 12$, 33%) described practices aiming to promote the right to participate, either examining teacher practices ($n = 1$, 3%), children's strategies for agency ($n = 2$, 6%), teacher and child practices/strategies simultaneously ($n = 6$, 17%), or teachers' and parents' practices ($n = 1$, 3%). Two studies (6%) relied on the analysis of documentation practices (e.g., portfolios), while also including teachers and children as participants.

Some studies described specificities of teacher-child interactions with the potential to promote children's right to participate, suggesting the importance of teachers' pedagogically sensitive attitude, characterized by respect, attention, and trust in children's capacities (Freitas Luís, Andrade, & Santos, 2015; Mesquita-Pires, 2012; Pettersson, 2015; Salminen, 2013). Examples of specific interactional strategies include the use of indirect requests for child participation, namely 'I wonder' formulations (Houen, Danby, Farrel, & Thorpe, 2016), the use of active listening, encouraging and validating children's talk (Alasuutari, 2014; Theobald & Kulti, 2012; Tholin & Jansen, 2012), and the promotion of conversations and discussions by referring to shared rules and classroom management (Salminen, 2013). Some studies (e.g., Houen et al., 2016) described nonverbal aspects of teacher-child interactions (e.g., silences during a conversation).

Other studies analysed practices aiming to promote children's participation in specific activities, namely in documentation practices such as portfolios, or presentations of children's work (Knauf, 2017; Pettersson, 2015), and in the resolution of peer disputes, with children contributing to organize interactions and making their voices heard (Mashford-Scott & Church, 2011). Other studies observed child participation in a wide range of activities, from free play

to teacher-planned or child-planned activities (Freitas Luís et al., 2015), although giving preference for active experiences, such as manipulating tools, over static or passive activities (Nah & Lee, 2016).

Importantly, few studies examined children's strategies to exercise their right to participate, stressing the role of strategies of silence, avoidance, and negotiation as ways for children to resist an adult's remark, or to be in control, defending their space and partially accepting decisions established by adults (Markstrom & Hallden, 2009). Together with negotiation, the role of imagination was documented as ways to promote children's instructive roles, control, and agency, with resistance and opposition being considered forms of mobilizing agency (Shaik & Ebrahim, 2015).

Finally, one study addressed the role of professional development and reflexive practices as means to change teachers' practices towards supporting and improving conditions for children's participation (Mesquita-Pires, 2012). In the context of a case study and using two data collection points, the author described the transformation of teachers' practices, through discussion and experiential learning focused on how to create enabling environments, materials, routines, and attitudes, contributing to new opportunities for adults to listen to and adequately respond to children.

While some studies documented children's capacity to manage their personal autonomy, being able to accept or decline to participate according to their own will (Houen et al., 2016; Markstrom & Halden, 2009), others observed teachers' greater agentic status, having more power than children, with the possibility to promote but also limit child participation (e.g., Alasuutari, 2014; Mashford-Scott & Church, 2011; Salminen, 2013, Pettersson, 2015). Additionally, some studies observed child participation as secondary to the planning (Alasuutari, 2014), with democratic approaches occurring only sporadically (Tholin & Jansen, 2012), and no real opportunities being offered for children to exert influence, for instance, in documentation processes (Pettersson, 2015).

2.5.3. Ideas and practices related to participation

Few studies ($n = 3$, 8%) investigated both practices and ideas simultaneously, although none of them documented associations between ideas and practices. Two studies examining both teacher and child practices and perceptions (Nah & Lee, 2016; Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012). For instance, children's participation in designing learning spaces and activities, such

as the development of a play area with adult's support, was described as empowering children (Nah & Lee, 2016).

Another study described variations in children's ideas and experiences as a function of ECE process quality (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). In fact, also within the studies focusing solely on practices, a few mentioned the importance of ECE settings' quality to the promotion of child participation, suggesting that high-quality contexts are more focused on children's voices and initiatives (e.g., Freitas Luís et al., 2015; Houen et al., 2016; Sheridan & Samuelson, 2001).

2.5.4. Legal documentation

Three studies (8%) analysed participation practices as addressed in specific legal documents. These documents included legislation, guidelines, or documents regulating ECE practices, and defined participation as taking part, being involved in decision making, and able to make their own choices, respecting children's interests (Ärlemalm–Hagsér, 2013; Batur Musaoglu & Haktanir, 2012; Synodi, 2014).

One study ($n = 1$, 3%) analysed both participation practices as addressed in a specific document (i.e., curriculum) and teachers' ideas about participation (Leinonen et al., 2014), again framing participation as children being able to choose. Nonetheless, this study did not test associations between these two aspects.

Notably, all studies described in this section highlighted that consideration for children's voices and initiatives is scarce, or absent in the different documents analysed. Participation and agency seem to be neglected, and the documents do not reflect real participation as indicated in the CRC. Rigidity and bureaucracy of educational systems are pointed as obstacles to effective consideration and implementation of children's rights (Synodi, 2014).

3.5.5. Child outcomes

Either investigating ideas and/or practices, only few studies ($n = 5$, 14%) tested associations between ideas about or experiences of participation and specific child outcomes. One study reported associations between teachers' ideas about their own practices and teachers' reports of children's self-regulation (Kangas et al., 2015), suggesting support for children's self-regulation differs as a function of levels of participation. Specifically, support

for children's self-regulation was more frequent when acknowledging the child and his/her opinions than when providing opportunities for child participation in decision making and pedagogical planning.

Another study reported associations between children's ideas about their opportunities to participate and their subjective wellbeing (Sandseter & Seland, 2016), suggesting, for instance, positive associations between children's experience of being autonomous and being able to use the ECE classroom areas whenever they want, and liking the center and being happier there. Three other studies analysed child outcomes in the context of case studies. One study investigated associations between teachers' practices and children's sense of belonging and autonomy (Freitas Luís et al., 2015), suggesting that children's autonomy and sense of belonging increase when participation is promoted. Another study described multiple benefits of child participation, following the implementation of a professional development intervention, not only for children (e.g., increased autonomy, communication, persistence in problem solving, and self-care skills) but also for teachers (e.g., increased sensitivity and stimulation of learning processes) (Mesquita-Pires, 2012). A third study described benefits from participation for both children and adults, such as increases in children's confidence, communication, cooperation and negotiation skills, and increased teachers' attentiveness and respect for children's ideas, interests, and needs (Nah & Lee, 2016). However, associations between variables were not considered.

4. Discussion

It was our purpose to map peer-reviewed empirical research addressing children's right to participate in center-based ECE settings. This mapping was needed to identify gaps in available research and informing the field on how to move forward. Interestingly, the first noteworthy finding was that, despite the growing interest in children's right to participate, the number of peer-reviewed empirical publications on this topic is still scarce. More empirical, peer-reviewed research is thus needed to inform ECE policy and practice in meaningful ways.

4.1. Contexts of research

Studies included in this review were published from 2001 on. Although the CRC entered into effect in 1990, when most countries ratified it, the shift to approaches based on the views of the child was not immediate, which might also help explain the scarce number of

empirical publications retrieved. In fact, views of children as social agents, active participants, and "beings" rather than "becomings" were progressively adopted in subsequent years (e.g., Christensen & James, 2000; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999; Mayall, 2000; Prout & James, 1997).

This shift was important for children's rights to be seen as worthy of investigation, with researchers becoming more interested in listening to children, investigating their perspectives and opinions, and attempting to construct more sophisticated theories of child participation (Thomas, 2012). The statement issued in General Comment No. 7 (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005) also reinforced the attention drawn to children's right to participate in decision making (Harcourt & Einarsdóttir, 2011).

One specific aim of this review was to identify the social and scientific contexts in which research on children's right to participate in ECE settings has been conducted. As anticipated, research is conducted mostly in northern Europe countries, namely in Finland, Sweden, and Norway. These are countries where, for decades, public discourse and legislation have addressed the promotion of children's rights and acknowledged children as active citizens (e.g., Kjørholt, 2002). As suggested by Hart (1992), children's participation has become fundamental in the approach to the implementation of children's rights in several countries, and this might be an area for valuable exchange of experiences between northern and southern European countries as well as countries from other parts of the world. Therefore, comparative studies are needed to promote and inform such exchanges.

Relatedly, no study from the United States met the inclusion criteria. The CRC entered into force in 1990, and most countries ratified it, including all members of the United Nations, except the United States. Unlike European countries, where child participation has been reinforced by formal policies and national educational structures throughout the years, in the United States a national mandate and formal policies for child participation are lacking. Therefore, participation policies are mostly bottom-up and there are no standards structuring and regulating consideration of children's participation rights in educational curricula. Consequently, education does not necessarily address child participation, and recent efforts to promote participation in education settings have not proved effective (Mitra, Serriere, Kirshner, 2014).

Regarding scientific domains, most studies were conducted within the education field, with few studies analysing children's right to participate from a psychological point of view. We argue that strengthening the contributions of educational psychology to the field may deepen our knowledge on the cognitive and behavioral outcomes potentially involved in

children's experiences of the right to participate, such as motivation, self-regulation, social skills, and self-concept.

4.2. Definitions and conceptual framework

When considering main definitions and theoretical backgrounds, this review suggests that current sociological, legal, democratic, and educational discourses converge in emphasizing children's right to participate as a pivotal dimension of high-quality ECE. As noted by Malone and Hartung (2010), a shared and consistent definition of children's right to participate might be hard to attain, as it appears to be a multifaceted concept. Still, in this systematic review, different conceptualizations were frequently combined, resulting on the broad shared assumption that the right to participate presupposes listening to children, recognizing their competence, and involving them in decision making.

After the CRC placed children's right to participate on the agenda, including in ECE settings, many conceptualizations of children's participation and agency emerged from sociology of childhood (Lansdown, 2005). Therefore, it is not surprising that these two perspectives are frequently combined. Nonetheless, they both seem relevant to understand various positions and discussions about children's right to participate. For instance, studies framing participation from both legal and sociological perspectives (e.g., Alasuutari, 2014) documented the need to validate children's talk and take their views into account, reinforcing the notion of the competent child.

Participation has also been described as involvement, as a way of translating this abstract concept into real action (e.g., Baraldi & Iervese, 2014). Studies relying on this definition reported increases in children's involvement associated with opportunities to participate, together with an increased sense of belonging and general wellbeing (e.g., Freitas Luís et al., 2015).

A democratic approach was also considered in some studies, reflecting the persistent influence of Dewey's philosophy of education. Research focused on this paradigm proposed the implementation of democratic practices related to documentation (Knauf, 2017), or child participation in a play area development project (Nah & Lee, 2016). Georgescu (2008) notes Dewey's pedagogical maxim of 'learning by doing' contributed to extensive reflections on child-centred pedagogies (i.e., promoting children's decision making), interactive teaching and learning (i.e., encouraging children to participate and take part in the construction of learning), democratic schools (i.e., helping children understand the nature of citizenship and providing

the necessary knowledge and skills to maintaining democracy), or reflexive practices (i.e., developing principles, knowledge, methods, and tools aimed at assisting ECE teachers promoting child participation). In fact, conceiving children as active pursuers of their own objectives is of great relevance to the study of children's right to participate.

Curiously, Honneth's theory of recognition (1995) was not referred to in this body of research, despite its acknowledgement by theorists on children's rights (e.g., Alderson, 2000; Lansdown, 1994; Thomas, 2012).

4.3. Voices heard

Importantly, there was greater emphasis on teacher's perspectives and practices than on children's ideas, experiences, or strategies towards exercising their right to participate. The limited focus on children's perspectives and experiences is likely not the result of researchers and practitioners devaluing children's voices, although it may reflect traditional roles and power relations between teachers and children (e.g., Alderson, 2000). However, it may also be associated with the methodological challenges involved in researching with young children, including the lack of validated and authentic instruments (Lansdown, Jimerson, & Shahroozi, 2014). Nonetheless, consistent with the underlying conceptual framework, children's voices should be a primary focus of future research on children's right to participate, alongside the inclusion of additional informants or actors.

4.4. Methodological approaches

Regarding methodological approaches, the prominence of qualitative studies in this review is consistent with the study of teachers' and children's perspectives/voices on the right to participate, and particularly relevant to understanding subjective experiences in natural contexts. Nevertheless, we argue that there is a lack of quantitative research and research based on mixed methods. From an educational psychology perspective, a quantitative approach would be valuable to document the effects of the right to participate on children's development and wellbeing as well as its effects on adults and organizations, advancing the field beyond (mostly) values-based (i.e., conceptual) arguments.

Relatedly, few studies reported using measures specifically designed to assess children's right to participate. We argue that the lack of measures, with sound psychometric characteristics, to measure the implementation of children's right to participate in ECE, may

be an obstacle to the development of the field and should be addressed in future research. Such sound measures would allow for important cross-context comparisons.

Importantly, as shown in this review, research on children's rights, and more specifically on children's right to participate, seems to have little tradition in experimentation and evaluation (Petticrew, 2003). Future studies should use high-quality evaluation studies to establish links between young children's right to participate and specific individual outcomes. This might also contribute to publication in highly ranked journals and, thus, increased dissemination.

4.5. Focus of research

Most studies described ideas about participation and, to a lesser extent, practices aiming to promote participation. Teachers' ideas reflect different levels of child participation, from being heard to making independent choices (e.g., Hart, 1992), while children's ideas highlight the possibility of exerting participation through silence, resistance or avoidance strategies, which may be considered important interaction competences (e.g., Hutchby, 2002), and a way of demonstrating agency (Shaik & Ebrahim, 2015). Studies focusing on practices also reflect both child capacity and agency, and teachers' agentic status, mirroring the traditional imbalance in the relationships between teachers and children (e.g., Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012).

Importantly, most studies focused on a single level of analyses, with limited consideration of associations among ideas and practices and their potential outcomes for children, adults, and organizations. Indeed, studies examining individual outcomes of the right to participate are almost nonexistent, as previously acknowledged by Reynaert et al. (2009). Nonetheless, the few studies considering child outcomes identified self-regulation, general wellbeing, and increased autonomy, communication, and problem-solving skills as positive consequences of participation for children.

Even though participation is understood more in terms of process rather than in terms of results (Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012), we argue that evidence about children's, adults', and organizational outcomes of experiencing the right to participate may be instrumental in informing policy makers and practitioners about the educational, developmental, and social benefits of participation processes. Such evidence may allow the field to move further beyond arguments built around participation as a value, and inform policy makers and practitioners

about the conditions under which participation experiences may benefit children's development and wellbeing.

Interestingly, when focusing on specific features of teacher-child interactions, some studies reported the importance attributed to teachers' pedagogically sensitive attitude, suggesting specific strategies and activities to promote participation. Moreover, some studies considered nonverbal aspects of communication between teachers and children, potentially capturing less observable aspects of the right to participate. This is important because it suggests several forms of participation in early ages have been considered. This is also in accordance with Article 12 of the CRC (1980), which suggests children's views should be given due weight in accordance with age and maturity, but not devalued because of age.

Participation as stated in legal documents was also analysed in the studies reviewed here. Although suggesting limited opportunities for child participation, the analysis of the right to participate in regulating documents, such as national decrees, seems useful to evaluate the implementation of this right at the policy-level and to understand the guidelines for ECE practice that might influence teachers' decisions.

Another aspect emerging from our results is the role of professional development and reflexive practices. Including children's rights and child-centred approaches in teacher's training, and reflecting on specific practices aiming to promote participation, can be important in building teacher awareness and develop specific competences towards the promotion of this right (e.g., Emilson & Folkesson, 2006).

4.6. Limitations

This review is limited by its inclusion criteria. Importantly, a criterium derived from the broader research project that encompasses this review, resulted in the exclusion of a limited number of studies focusing on the right to participate of young children with disabilities, the group of young children least likely to express their views and to be heard. Further, our focus on peer-reviewed research may also have resulted in the exclusion of research studies that tackle some of the gaps highlighted here. Finally, the features and diversity of the evidence-base limited the depth of our analyses and may have contributed to an essentially descriptive approach, while also preventing meaningful meta-analytical synthesis.

5. Conclusion

Children's right to participate relates to many dimensions and processes (Lekkai, 2016). The right to participate should not be considered static, but dependent on the characteristics of the activities, organizations, and people involved. This seems fundamental to promote a culture of participation in which researchers, policy makers, and practitioners need to be aligned. By mapping peer-reviewed research on children's right to participate, we witnessed some conceptual consistency in available research. Also, research is already giving voice to different actors, including children, although to a limited extent, and applying some methodological diversity.

Our findings support claims from Kirby and Bryson (2002) and Lansdown, Jimerson, and Shahroozi (2014) regarding the need to further explore the effectiveness of participatory methods and the outcomes associated with the realization of children's right to participate. In fact, given the lack of empirical evidence on the effects of participation on children's socio-cognitive development and wellbeing, further studies should investigate associations between experiencing this right and the potential individual outcomes proposed in literature. Future research should prioritize investigating the potential effects of experiencing this right, bridging the gap between the benefits identified at a conceptual level and concrete evidence.

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CHAPTER III | WHAT DO CHILDREN SAY: CHOOSING CLASSROOMS: A STRUCTURED INTERVIEW ON CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN ECE[2]

Note. To ensure consistency throughout the dissertation, the terms 'early childhood education and care', and the abbreviation 'ECEC', included in the published version of this chapter, were replaced by 'early childhood education' and 'ECE'.

Abstract

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

Keywords: Participation, Children's ideas, Interview, Early childhood education

1. **Children's right to participate**

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

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

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

the course of events in their lives (Hart, 1992). Based on this, Hart proposed eight levels of child participation (i.e., from manipulation by adults, to decision making initiated by children and shared with adults), noticing that the degree to which children should have a voice in anything is a subject of strong divergence. Nonetheless, the emergence of this conceptualization was determinant to the discussion about children's participation, and to the subsequent shift from endogenous (i.e., emerging from reflection on practice) to exogenous conceptual frameworks (i.e., encompassing contributions from political and social theory). Children's voices have become a representation of the commitment to the values of freedom, democracy, and care (James, 2007). Moreover, for Lundy (2007), it is the combination of voice and action that leads to genuine participation, inclusion, and belonging.

The view of children as competent and knowledgeable actors with their own valuable experiences, ideas, and choices highlights the importance of listening to children and young people. As part of listening, it is necessary to explore children's perceptions of their lives, their interests, priorities and concerns, in order to promote child wellbeing, learning, and development (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). This proposition is aligned with self-determination theory as it is focused on the basic psychological needs of competence and autonomy (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Furthermore, research findings suggest that the more children experience opportunities to participate, the more they gradually develop perceptions of competence, in the most diverse domains (Harter, 1999). In addition, several authors discuss the potential impacts that children's participation can have on child development, self-esteem, self-efficacy, friendships, communication, negotiation, conflict resolution and decision making skills (Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin, & Sinclair, 2003; Sinclair, 2004). There is evidence of benefits that extend beyond the early childhood education (ECE) setting: children who have come from settings focused on the promotion of child decision making have higher achievement in language skills (e.g., Sylva, 1992).

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

children perceive their own classroom regarding participation practices and the activities and decisions they are able to perform there).

1.1. Children's participation and the quality of ECE settings

Quality in early childhood education seems to be instrumental in ensuring positive developmental outcomes (e.g., Bryant, Zaslow, & Burchinal, 2010). Although the definition of quality is complex and may be analysed from different perspectives (Bairrão, 1998; Katz, 1998; Tobin, 2005), it is agreed upon that children's rights constitute a key aspect in the framework of education and educational quality (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). An early childhood setting constitutes a democratic forum in which participants learn to understand each other's perspectives, values, and histories. Listening to children's ideas contributes to the establishment of respectful and educational relationships which enhance adults' understanding of children's priorities, interests, feelings, and concerns. This understanding leads to changing assumptions and raising new expectations for both children and adults about children's capabilities (Pascal & Bertram, 2009).

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

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

children experience quality within diverse ECE settings, as well as a global understanding of pedagogical quality will be lost (Sheridan, 2007). In fact, interaction, communication, and participation describe high-quality pedagogical practices (NAEYC, 2006).

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

1.2. Children's ideas about participation

There are convergent discourses from distinct areas of knowledge on the relevance of listening to children's perspectives regarding their everyday lives starting in early childhood settings (Clark & Moss, 2005). According to Nutbrown and Clough (2009), any study aiming to include children's perspectives must consider issues of 'voice' as central and find ways of listening to young children in order to take their views into account. Therefore, it seems pertinent to assess children's ideas about participation. Ideas can be studied within sociocultural perspectives focused on beliefs. They can be defined as psychological mechanisms, built on experience, that drive people towards action (Sigel, 1985). Ideas are molar constructs, encompassing thoughts, theories, or perceptions. Because ideas comprise knowledge about the present and the future, they refer not only to views and perceptions, but also to expectations, being related to information or evidence of some kind (Sigel, McGillicuddy-Delisi, & Goodnow, 1992).

Pedagogical experiences take place in a variety of permeable contexts that together contribute to the development of each persons' views of the world, their perceptions of their own competencies, and recognition of opportunities to make choices (Malafaia, Teixeira, Neves, & Menezes, 2016). Early childhood education research has documented children's capacity to develop and express their ideas, perspectives, and points of view about various

issues which mattered to them in different social contexts (Nutbrown & Clough, 2009). More specifically, children's perceptions were sensitive to the features of educational settings (Oliveira-Formosinho and Lino, 2008). The extent to which teachers support and promote children's participation was a key factor in children forming their perceptions (Emilson & Folkesson, 2006; Smith, 2002). Research suggests that from a child's perspective, it is vital for the child to participate in decision making and to exert influence on their ECE settings. However, they attributed different meanings to the concept 'decide' depending on who is making the decision and in which context it is made. Further, children considered their opportunities to participate in ECE settings limited, except for their own activities and play (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). Research also suggests children experience equal participation in decision making if the situation is characterized by reciprocity, turn-taking, and involvement (Sheridan, 2007).

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

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

In order to plan and prepare their work, ECE teachers should know how children think, including the actual contents of these thoughts. Conducting interviews with children may be a good way to ensure that teaching and learning begin at the child's developmental level. Some

studies have already focused on children's experiences and perspectives regarding participation in ECE settings (e.g., Oliveira-Formosinho & Araújo, 2004; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). In the ECE literature there are two ways to assess child participation: interviews (e.g., Bae, 2004) and observation of interactions. Interviews primarily assess children's perspective on decision making, how they conceive their opportunities to decide, and how they decide to exercise power. Classroom interaction observation analyses communicational features that influence children's opportunities to participate. More recently, a study by Sandseter and Seland (2016), assessed 4–6 year-old children's experiences of subjective wellbeing and opportunities for participation. Findings showed that the opportunity to influence where to move, what to do and with whom, was crucial for children's wellbeing in ECE institutions. However, the number of studies on children's ideas about their experiences in exercising influence in the ECE classroom has been quite limited. The few studies available were conducted almost exclusively in northern Europe.

Despite of the relevance of this topic and all the efforts to study and to promote participation, we are still far from achieving this goal. Participation often takes the passive connotation of the child having been 'listened to' or 'consulted'. There is still much uncertainty about the proper mechanisms to involve children and in which decisions, activities, or subject areas (Clark, 2005; Horwath, Hodgkiss, Kalyva, & Spyrou, 2011; Sinclair, 2004). Evidence also shows that children in high-quality ECE settings report they were often involved in situations in which they participated, negotiated, and made decisions. However, due to restrictions placed on their influence they rarely seemed to effectively participate and impact the overall ECE organization: its routines, contents, and activities (Sheridan, 2007).

Promoting participation in pedagogical settings means wanting and being able to assess the interests of the child (Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010) and in fact, although different approaches have contributed to this debate and to increased openness to listen to children's ideas about their experiences of the world, such contributions do not seem to be enough to guarantee that their voices and points of view have been effectively heard and considered (James, 2007). Moreover, the little empirical evidence on children's ideas about participation may be at least partially explained by the lack of sound measures.

In order to develop a sound measure and contribute to the study of children's right to participate in ECE we have developed and tested a structured interview protocol to assess children's views, perceptions, and expectations about participation and the implementation of participation practices in ECE classrooms. This study presents the "Choosing Classrooms: A

Structured Interview on Children's Right to Participate" protocol as well as the results of a pilot study in Portuguese ECE settings.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

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

2.2. Measure

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

Table 1

Participation and non-participation narratives

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

Following the presentation of each narrative and respective image, the children were asked questions developed from a review of the literature (e.g., Sheridan, 2007; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001; Tangen, 2008). The objective of the questions was to elicit in the children responses in three different areas during the individual interview. The first set of questions was about children's conceptions of participation in the classroom and it provided a means to analyse each classroom. The second set of questions keyed into children's expectations about participation which allowed a comparison between classrooms. The third set sought children's perceptions about participation, eliciting comparison with the child's own classroom.

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

Table 2
Interview protocol

Step	Instruction/Questions	Material	Goal
1. Introduction	The researcher presents the task: "Let's talk about some things boys and girls do in preschool, ok? What do you most like to do in preschool? There are very different preschool classrooms, do you know? I'll show you two images, of two classrooms, and I'll tell you how they are…"	—	To explain the task
2. Presentation of each narrative, with a supporting image, followed by three questions each	The researcher reads the narrative A (or B), while presenting an image, followed by four questions: (i) What do you think about this classroom? (ii) How do you think boys and girls feel in this classroom? (iii) What do you think these boys and girls think of their classroom? (iv) What do you think boys and girls do in this classroom?[a] The researcher repeats the previous step, using the remaining narrative and image.	Image X + Narrative A or Image Y + Narrative B 	To assess children's conceptions of participation
3. Presentation of both images simultaneously, comparing the two classrooms and introducing a small doll, followed by four questions	The researcher gives the instruction, while presenting a small doll (adjusting to the gender of the child, i.e., 'Pipo' for boys and 'Pipa' for girls), followed by 4 questions: "Now, let's look at these two pictures at the same time. Here we have 'Pipo'/'Pipa', who will soon start preschool, and he/she can choose which classroom to go to. In which of these two classrooms do you think Pipo/Pipa…" (i) … would feel better? (ii)… would have more fun? (iii) … would learn more? (iv) … would like the most?	Images X and Y Doll (Pipo or Pipa)	To assess children's expectations regarding participation
4. Presentation of both images simultaneously, followed by of a question	(i) Which classroom do you think is most similar to yours? (ii) Which of these two teachers is most similar to yours?[a] Why?[a]	Images X and Y 	To assess children's perceptions of participation
5. Presentation of a last question	Please tell me what activities have you already done in your classroom today. Who chose them?[a]	—	To assess children's perception of participation

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

After conducting this pilot study, a new question was included in step 2 of the protocol. The purpose was to assess a behavioural dimension of children's conceptions of participation – "What do you think boys and girls do in this classroom?" Also in step 4, two new questions regarding children's perceptions – "Which of these two teachers is most similar to yours? Why?" were added to obtain specific information about children's ideas of teacher practices. Lastly, a fifth step was added, "Please tell me what activities have you already done in your classroom today. Who chose them?" to more specifically assess the behavioural dimension of children's perceptions about participation experiences in their own classrooms.

2.3. Procedure

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

3. Results

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

Children's answers to the three questions regarding their conceptions about participation and non-participation classrooms (i.e., "What do you think about this classroom?", "How do you think boys and girls feel in this classroom?", and "What do you think these boys and girls think about their classroom?") were grouped in different categories.

Table 3 presents category frequencies and examples of children's answers that were coded in each category.

Table 3

Results from content analysis: Categories on children's conceptions about participation and non-participation classrooms

Category	Participation		Non-participation		Examples
	N	*%*	*n*	*%*	
What do you think about this classroom?					
Positive description	29	67.44	24	55.81	"good", "beautiful", "nice" "well", funny"
Negative description	1	2.33	6	13.95	"bad", "horrible", "very weird", "I don't like it that much", "untidy", "behaves badly"
Neutral answer	5	11.63	6	13.95	"more or less", "I don't know", "different"
It is the teacher who chooses	3	4.65	4	9.30	"children do what the teacher says", "the teacher doesn't let children choose the areas where to play"
It is to play	5	11.63	5	11.63	"all children are playing", "it has toys"
It is to work	2	4.65	4	9.30	"it is to work", "it has pencils", "it is to study"
How do you think boys and girls feel in this classroom?					
Positive feelings	38	88.37	31	72.09	"well", "very well", "happy", "good", "better", "they like it"
Negative feelings	1	2.33*	8	18.60*	"sad", "bad"
What do you think these boys and girls think about their classroom?					
Positive description	22	51.16	15	43.88	"happy", "nice", "they like a lot", "beautiful", "fresh", "funny", "good"
Negative description	2	4.65	3	6.98	"untidy", "very untidy", "they don't like it", "sad"
Neutral answer	3	6.98	7	16.28	"I don't know", "different", "more or less", "some think it is ok, others don't"
Children can choose	5	11.63*	0	0.00*	"the teacher is very good", "they think they can do anything", "the teacher is very important because she lets them choose and do important things"
It is the teacher who chooses	0	0.00*	8	18.60*	"the teacher is very bad", "children should know the area in which they are going to play", "the teacher says everything" , "the teacher orders"
It is to play	10	23.26	7	16.28	"they're thinking in playing, play games and play in the home corner", "doing puzzles, "they have more toys"

* *p* < .05.

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

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

Table 4

Results from content analysis: Categories on children's expectations when comparing participation and non-participation classrooms

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

$* p < .05.$

Results on children's perceptions about participation (i.e., focusing on the comparison between the classrooms presented and the child's own classroom) indicated that 51.16% of children identified their classroom as a participation classroom (e.g., "because sometimes we can choose the areas in which we want to play", "because in my classroom children can choose where to play, the teacher only says our names when we have to work"), whereas 49.19% children identified their classroom to be a non-participation classroom (e.g., "the teacher is bossy and children can't choose"). These differences were not statistically significant.

Finally, log-linear and chi-square tests were performed to test for differences as a function of children's gender and age for all categories analyzed, but no statistically significant differences were found.

4. Discussion

In this study, we sought to give children a voice on their participation in ECE settings by developing a measure to assess children's conceptions, expectations, and perceptions on the matter. We conducted a pilot study to test how 5 and 6 year-old children attending ECE responded to the "Choosing Classrooms" structured interview in order to determine its usefulness in eliciting children's ideas about differing participation experiences.

Play clearly emerged as children's preferred activity in ECE settings. Although emerging in the context of an introductory question, this finding is consistent with previous reports that if they could decide by themselves what they would like to do in ECE, children would decide to play (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). In Sheridan and Samuelsson, the opportunity for children to play without disruptions, with access to materials and activities, is described as an indicator of high-quality ECE settings. In addition, children's ECE activities should include the ability to exercise choice in play opportunities, as a way for them to experience their right to participate and exert influence (Bae, 2009).

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

Regarding children's expectations, the participation classroom was consistently described as the one in which children would feel better, have more fun, and liked the most, suggesting young children seemed to make a clear distinction between the two types of classrooms described in the interview, valuing more the classrooms in which participation occurred. On the contrary, the non-participation classroom was more associated with negative feelings, and was also seen as a place in which the adult decides more. Predominant decision making by the adult has been described in the literature as a characteristic of non-participation contexts, whereas the principles and democratic values of redistribution of power between adults and children, decision-sharing, and children's involvement in decision making, have been described as typical of participation contexts (e.g., Hart, 1997; Sinclair, 2004).

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

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

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

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CHAPTER IV | WHAT DO TEACHERS SAY: TEACHERS' IDEAS ABOUT CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN ECE[3]

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[3]This chapter is submitted for publication.

Abstract

This study investigated teachers' ideas about children's right to participate in early childhood education (ECE). Participants were 59 teachers, aged between 26 and 60 years old ($M = 43.07$ years, $SD = 8.58$), all female, from 59 ECE classrooms from 24 randomly selected ECE centres located in the metropolitan area of Lisbon. Teacher's ideas were collected using a qualitative interview specifically designed for the purpose. Based on content analysis, multiple correspondence analysis, and cluster analysis, we identified profiles of teachers' ideas, and a typology of teachers. Results suggest four teacher profiles: Teachers motivation, Teachers' conditioned responsibility, Children's benefits, and Context dependent. Profiles were significantly associated with years of professional experience and type of institution. Teachers' age was significantly different across profiles. Findings provide insights to fuller understand teachers' positioning about this right.

Keywords: Children's right to participate, Participation, Early childhood education, Teachers' ideas

1. Teachers' ideas about children's right to participate in ECE

Participation is a requirement for the realization of children's rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provided an unprecedented incentive to children's right to participate, particularly through its Article 12, which states that children have the right to express their own views in all matters pertaining to them, and to have those views respected and taken into consideration (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). The promotion of children's right to participate in decision making processes affecting their lives reflects investments in children and in the promotion of their wellbeing (European Commission, 2013). In addition, promoting participation leads to more democratic structures and societies, characterized by transparent and reciprocal adult-child relationships, where children are entitled to respect for their views and experiences, and included from the earliest stage in all initiatives (Lansdown, 2001).

Participation has been applied into various forms and processes that offer long-term opportunities for sustained educational experiences (Pascal & Bertram, 2009). At the research level, a growing body of studies has highlighted the relevance of promoting children's right to participate in early childhood education (ECE) settings (e.g., Bae, 2009; Emilson, 2007;

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Turnšek, 2008; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001), describing participation as an indicator of ECE quality (Sheridan, 2007), and emphasizing the role of ECE professionals in promoting this right (e.g., Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010; Venninen et al., 2014). The promotion of children's right to participate in ECE takes place in the context of relationships and interactions established between children and ECE teachers (Broström et al., 2015). Relatedly, children's right to participate has also been understood as the right to exert influence, through a process of shared decision making with adults (Venninen, Leinonen, Lipponen, & Ojala, 2014). However, despite the crucial role adults play in promoting child participation, research on how ECE teachers understand and conceive child participation in ECE (i.e., teachers' ideas) is still scarce (Correia, Camilo, Aguiar, & Amaro, 2019). Therefore, in this paper we aimed at investigating ECE teachers' ideas about children's right to participate.

1.1. Conceptualizing and framing children's right to participate in ECE

Various studies demonstrated children's capability to participate in decision making, providing important contributions to shape their environments and their own agendas (Clark, 2010; Clark & Moss, 2005). These notions require complex changes in society, and some scepticism still exists regarding children's capability to participate meaningfully. General Comment No. 7 (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005) outlines the implementation of children's right to participate from the beginning of children's lives, through ECE and beyond, encouraging the recognition of children as social actors, with their own interests, capacities, and vulnerabilities. Further, this comment describes adults' role in providing protection, guidance, and support to children's participation in their everyday activities. General Comment No. 12 (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009) highlights children's right to be heard, recognizing children as capable of forming their own views, and frames participation as indispensable for creating of a positive social climate in ECE settings, proposing the adoption of child-centred practices by adults.

In Portugal, although the CRC has been ratified in 1990, there is no specific agency or body responsible for the implementation of the CRC, and the lack of awareness and visibility of participatory rights in the country has been highlighted (Eurochild, 2015). Nonetheless, Portuguese ECE teachers are mandated to promote democratic rules and children's active participation and involvement in curriculum management, through collaborative practices (e.g., Decree-Law No. 240/2001; Decree-Law No. 241/2001). More recently, the National Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education (Lopes da Silva, Marques, Mata, & Rosa,

2016) clearly stated the importance of promoting children's right to participate and described implications for ECE teachers' practices. For instance, ECE teachers are encouraged to recognize children as subjects and agents of the educational process, to listen to them and consider their perspectives, and to ensure children's participation in planning, decision making, and evaluation processes inside the ECE classroom and the ECE setting.

Importantly, in ECE, participation takes place through teacher-child interactions. Several elements define the structure of participatory interactions: person, relationships, systems of action, contexts of practice, and time (Vieira, 2017). In fact, to participate, children must be considered capable of making their own decisions within relationships with significant adults that empower them as social actors, rights holders, and active participants (Corsaro, 2005; Lansdown, 2005). Moreover, these relationships and interactions are embedded in systems of action taking place in specific contexts or situations, where time emerges as a transversal dimension (e.g., influencing the frequency and duration of participatory interactions and experiences). These elements are also present within Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework (2005), namely through the notions of process (i.e., particular forms of interaction between organisms and their environments) and person (i.e., with specific dispositions, resources, and demands) that develops in contact with an immediate or remote environmental context (i.e., composed by different systems, such as the ECE microsystem), in specific time periods.

Applied to the study of children's participation in ECE, these interacting elements illustrate the complexity of participatory interactions and reflect three different levels of analysis: values and principles of participation, actions and practices towards its promotion, and the contextual limits and barriers teachers face while promoting participation (Vieira, 2017). Considering this framework, and focusing on values and principles of participation, it seems important to investigate ECE teachers' ideas about children's right to participate. Specifically, given that teachers design and implement activities based on their ideas of best practices and experiences for children (e.g., Ebrahim, 2011), research should investigate teachers' ideas about which activities, practices, or conditions enable children's right to participate in ECE, as well as about potential benefits from promoting and exerting this right.

1.2. Teachers' ideas about children's right to participate in ECE

Ideas are generally defined as an overarching construct encompassing values, beliefs, conceptions, expectations, and perceptions. Further, ideas can also be understood as mental

representations, referring to mental constructions of experience (Sigel, 1985). Teachers' ideas have implications for teaching and decision making and thus may help understand classroom practices (e.g., Clark & Peterson, 1986; Fives & Buehl, 2012; Kagan, 1992; OECD, 2009; Pajares, 1992; Patterson, Doppen, & Misco, 2012; Stipek & Byler, 1997).

Teachers' ideas are permeable to the cultural values of the society or groups they belong to. For instance, teachers from western societies that promote individualism and intergenerational independence seem to value more autonomy, independence, assertiveness, and self-sufficiency than teachers from oriental societies, more influenced by collectivistic philosophies (Marchand & d'Orey, 2008). Similarly, teachers with child-centred beliefs hold more democratic perspectives, are more sensitive and responsive to children's interests and actions, and promote more opportunities for children to choose and exert influence (e.g., Koran & Avci, 2017). These beliefs are aligned with constructivist views of learning (i.e., children seen not as passive recipients, but rather as active participants in acquiring knowledge, with teachers emphasizing children's enquiry, giving them opportunities to develop their own solutions and problems, and allowing their active role in activities), in opposition to direct transmission ideologies (i.e., teachers' main role is communicating in a clear, structured way, explaining correct solutions and providing children with clear, solvable problems thus promoting teacher-child hierarchy and expecting children to comply with adults' decisions) (OECD, 2009). These views are well established in educational research, at least in western countries (Kim, 2005).

Previous studies analysed ECE teachers' ideas about children's right to participate, focusing on how teachers conceive and define children's participation. Participation has been described by teachers either as being part of a group and listening to others (e.g., Johansson & Sandberg, 2010), participating in planning and decision making (Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010; Turnšek, 2008; Zorec, 2015), or mostly as children's independent activity and choice, with teachers' support (Broström et al., 2015).

ECE teachers' ideas about practices that promote participation have also been addressed in the literature. The promotion of opportunities for discussion and negotiation in decision making, within shared experiences and rules, in both child-initiated and adult-initiated activities, is perceived by teachers as a good practice to support child participation (Kangas, Ojala, & Venninen, 2015; Kangas, Venninen, & Ojala, 2016; Lopes, Correia, and Aguiar, 2016; Salminen, 2013; Turnšek & Pekkarinen, 2009; Venninen & Leinonen, 2013). Facilitating professional skills for supporting children's perspectives, through reflexive practices and contact with new pedagogic principles (Kangas et al., 2016), and enabling a participation

environment characterized by pedagogical sensitivity and respect for children's will to participate (Kangas et al., 2016; Koran & Avci, 2017; Salminen, 2013) are other examples of perceived good practices, consistent with child-centred approaches.

Further, teachers perceive barriers and obstacles to the implementation of children's participation, such as the use of a commanding and directing language/communication style (Koran & Avci, 2017), school structures characterized by long-standing interaction patterns designed to establish and maintain teacher power and student subordination (Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012), adult-child ratios and managing workload (Venninen et al., 2014). On the other hand, teachers acknowledge several benefits from participation, such as increases in children's confidence, communication, cooperation and negotiation skills, as well as increases in teachers' attentiveness and respect for children's ideas, interests, and needs (Nah & Lee, 2016).

Nevertheless, existing evidence is dispersed and does not clarify teachers' structure of ideas regarding this topic and, consequently, does not provide complex information regarding their positioning, by considering the multiple dimensions related to children's participation in ECE simultaneously. Disentangling teachers' ideas about children's right to participate in ECE is thus important to the production of knowledge on the promotion of children's participation.

1.3. Contextual and individual characteristics associated with teachers' ideas

Teachers' beliefs have been described as subject to change (La Paro, Siepak, & Sctott-Little, 2009), context-dependent, and influenced by the situation, including physical resources, support from the board, or the group with whom teachers work (Faour, 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007; Verjovsky & Waldegg, 2005). Factors such as group size (Hedge & Cassidy, 2009) or children's needs (Thornton, 2005) may also influence teachers' ideas.

Similarly, research suggests teachers' individual characteristics influence teachers' beliefs (Fives & Buehl, 2012), namely teachers' age (e.g., Ghanizadeh & Moafian, 2009; Lesha, 2017, Sakellariou & Rentzoun, 2011), education (e.g., Faour, 2003; Vartuli, 1999), years of experience (e.g., Brownlee, 2003; Phipps & Borg, 2007), or personal and field experiences (e.g., Tarman, 2012). Particularly, younger ECE teachers tend to show more openness to reflection and change (Sakellariou & Rentzoun, 2011). Also, teachers holding a higher level of education are more likely to develop developmentally appropriate beliefs (Faour, 2003). Moreover, teachers seem to develop more constructivist (i.e., children as active participants, co-constructors of their learning process) beliefs during the first 2 years of their

career (Brownlee, 2003), and field experiences tend to give teachers the opportunity to modify their perceptions about teaching careers, with negative situations (e.g., negative examples of teaching) particularly impacting their beliefs (Tarman, 2012).

Despite the existing evidence on teacher beliefs, research on the correlates of teachers' ideas about children's right to participate in ECE is still scarce. Existing studies suggest teachers' ideas about participation seem to be influenced by the local culture (e.g., local practices and role of teachers), reflecting different guidelines and educational approaches, and documenting disparities between countries. For instance, the teachers' role in creating the best conditions for children's independent choices was frequently rated as one of the most important meanings of participation in Denmark, Estonia, Australia, and Sweden, but not in Greece (Broström et al., 2015). Also, teachers' perceptions of practices supporting children's expression and participation in daily activities are higher in public settings, and positively associated with group size (Lopes, Correia, & Aguiar, 2016) (cf. Appendix). However, other studies document teachers' perception of group size as an obstacle to the promotion of children's participation (e.g., Venninen et al., 2014). In addition, ECE teachers' perceptions about practices characterized by decision making by the adult are negatively associated with teachers' education and classroom process (i.e., teacher-child interactions) quality (Lopes, Correia, and Aguiar, 2016). Another study reported small differences between ECE teachers' and ECE student teacher' ideas, with most experienced teachers perceiving participation as listening to others, feeling respect for them, and being part of the group to a greater extent than teachers with less experience, suggesting a group-oriented approach of more experienced teachers (Johansson & Sandberg, 2010).

To our knowledge, no study investigated profiles of teachers' ideas about children's participation, or how these profiles are associated with teachers' individual characteristics and ECE context variables. Further investigation of teachers' beliefs and their correlates and is thus necessary (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Stipek & Byler, 2004).

1.4. The current study

We aimed to investigate ECE teachers' ideas about children's right to participate in centre-based ECE in Portugal. In this southern European country, ECE is optional, under supervision of the Ministry of Education, and available from age 3 until the age of compulsory education (i.e., 6 years by September 15th) (Law No. 4/97). However, universal access is mandated by law from the age of 4 (Law No. 65/2015). Further, ECE includes public, private

for-profit, and private non-profit settings - in the 2017/2018 school year, 53.1% of preschool-aged children attending ECE in Portugal were enrolled in public settings, 30.7% attended private non-profit settings, and 16.2% attended for-profit settings (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, 2018). In comparison with other European countries (except for Spain), Portugal is a considered a traditionally collectivist society (Hofested, 2001). Moreover, children's rights, and specifically children's right to participate, are particularly relevant in Portugal, where after almost half a century of a dictatorship that ended in 1974, democracy related concerns (i.e., towards the protection and promotion of personal interests, fundamental rights, freedoms, and opportunities to choose and participate in decision making) emerged as a national mandate, shared by policy makers, academics, and ECE practitioners (Sousa & Oxley, 2019).

In this study, we aimed to investigate how teachers understand, value, and promote child participation in Portuguese settings. We added to previous studies, by (a) identifying complex profiles of teachers' ideas about child participation, and (b) investigating the associations between these profiles and teachers' individual characteristics and ECE context variables.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants in this study were 59 ECE teachers (all female), with an age range between 26 and 60 years old ($M = 43.07$, $SD = 8.58$). Teachers worked in 59 ECE classrooms from 24 randomly selected ECE centres, located in the metropolitan area of Lisbon, Portugal. In the current study, classrooms were predominantly from the public sector (48.3%), but also from private for-profit centres (27.6%), and private non-profit centres (24.1%). Teachers' professional experience ranged between 2 and 39 years ($M = 19$, $SD = 8.36$). They were responsible for groups from 8 to 27 children ($M = 20.79$, $SD = 4.21$), with 75.9% of participating classrooms serving mixed-aged groups (i.e., children from 3 to 6 years-old).

Currently, in Portugal, a Masters' degree is the minimum qualification required to be an ECE teacher (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019). In our sample, all teachers had at least a higher-education degree in early childhood education or equivalent, with 12.1% holding a Masters' degree. Approximately a third of the teachers (18.6%) had a specialization course (e.g., Waldorf pedagogy, early intervention, special education). Although the

Portuguese Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education (Lopes da Silva et al., 2016) support ECE teachers' working in the entire ECE system, teachers may choose their pedagogical models. In this study, a multitude of pedagogical models was reported. According to teachers, 69.5% used only one pedagogical or curricular model, 27.1% used of a combination of different pedagogical models, and 3.4% did not mention which method they used. From those using only one model, 22.0% used the Modern Education Movement, 18.6% used the Work Project method, 8.5% used High Scope, 8.5% used the João de Deus method, 5.1% used the Optimist Project, 3.4% used Waldorf pedagogy, 1.7% used the Work per Objectives approach, and 1.7% used Experiential Education.

2.2. Instruments

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview specifically designed for the purpose, based on existing literature (e.g., Bedell, Khetani, Cousins, Coster, & Law, 2011; Shier, 2001, Sinclair, 2014; Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010). This interview consisted of 11 open-ended questions. Specifically, participants were asked to answer questions about their conceptions about children's right to participate, the strategies to promote it, the conditions needed to promote child participation, the obstacles or challenges to participation, or the possible effects or consequences from participation, at the child level. In addition, all teachers filled in a sociodemographic questionnaire, to collect information about their age, sex, education, years of experience, specializations, preferred pedagogical models, institution, and type of group they were responsible for.

2.3. Procedure

This study was conducted in the scope of a broader research project, "Children's right to participate in early childhood education: From rights to empirical evidence". The project was approved by the National Data Protection Commission and by the Institutional Review Board at ISCTE-IUL. Random selection, recruitment, and data collection took place during the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 school years (i.e., half of the participants in each year). After initial contacts with the boards of 170 centres, 19.4% resulted in meetings to present the project's main procedures. From centres that participated in meetings, we obtained a participation rate of 72.7%. All teachers provided written consent. Interviews, allowing an in-depth and flexible

exploration of ECE teachers' ideas, were conducted with each ECE teacher individually, according to their availability, and lasted from 8 to 50 minutes ($M = 20.91$).

2.4. Data analyses

We conducted content analysis of participants' responses, supported by NVivo Software, version 12. Data from the open-ended questions was initially reviewed, for a general identification of meanings. Conceptual categories were developed mostly by inductive analysis, with codes deriving from a bottom-up process. Nonetheless, a mixed process was used, with some categories defined through a top-down process (e.g., definitions of participation from existing literature). The final system of categories included 9 major conceptual categories (e.g., conceptions, practices), and 36 subcategories (e.g., agency, motivate), some of which encompassed sub-subcategories (e.g., self-esteem, autonomy) (see Table 1).

Each unit of analysis (i.e., words, sentences, or paragraphs) was assigned to one conceptual subcategory, based on a mutually exclusive set of categories. Coding was supported by a codebook, including the name and definition of each category and subcategory, ensuring a good fit between the system of categories and the original data. In addition, we verified the reliability of the coding process. For this purpose, 100 units of analysis were randomly selected and separately coded by an independent judge, who was given the category system codebook. Cohen's kappa was calculated separately for each conceptual category. Results showed good reliability indices, with Cohen's *kappa* ranging from .78 to 1 ($M = .90, DP = .11$).

To perform multivariate analysis, dummy coding was used to assign values that indicated presence or absence of conceptual (sub)categories for each participant (0 = not mentioned; 1 = mentioned). The subsequent selection of (sub)categories for the multivariate analysis was based on the following criteria: (a) avoiding both residual and over represented (sub)categories, that could be problematic when running the multiple correspondence analysis; and (b) retaining conceptually relevant (sub)categories.

To identify profiles of teachers' ideas, keeping their multidimensional configuration was necessary to deal simultaneously with all the (sub)categories and their multiple associations. As the input variables were qualitative, a multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) was performed to assess the relational structure between the multiple (sub)categories (Carvalho, 2017; Gifi, 1996; Greenacre, 2007; Heiser & Meulman 1994). As in an exploratory factorial analysis (EFA), one of the objectives of MCA is the definition of dimensions (factors)

to allow the graphical representation of the multidimensionality of the input, particularly, bi-dimensional graphs (Ramos & Carvalho, 2011). By using an optimal scaling procedure, the MCA algorithm assigns optimal quantifications to the categories and all of them are represented in these graphs. Therefore, the most relevant associations between the different categories are emphasized by geometric proximity in the factorial plan and design the configuration of each profile (see Figure 1).

Afterwards, the object scores (new quantitative variables) were used to group teachers according to their profiles. As the number of profiles was already known, a hierarchical cluster analysis (HCA) was performed first to validate the MCA solution. An agglomerative clustering algorithm was implemented through two different methods: ward's method and complete-linkage method (Hair et al., 2010). The HCA was suited by a non-hierarchical clustering algorithm (K-means) to obtain the optimal solution for grouping teachers in types (clusters) with homogeneous profiles.

Finally, associations between teachers' sociodemographic variables and their profiles (obtained through clustering solution) were tested by non-parametric and parametric tests (chi-square and analysis of variance, respectively) depending on whether the variables involved were both categorical or mixed (categorical and quantitative). Analysis were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 25).

3. Results

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentages of each (sub)category. Conceptual subcategories selected for subsequent analysis are highlighted in bold.

Table 1

Frequency and percentage of ECE teachers mentioning each (Sub)category (N = 59)

(Sub) Categories	Description	ECE teachers n (%)
Conceptions	*Teachers' definitions of participation*	
Agency	The child is viewed as an agent, capable of intervening in his/her community	**20 (33.9)**
Contributing	The child contributes by providing her opinion, according to his/her capacities	**30 (50.8)**
Being heard	The child is heard, and the adult values and respects his/her voice	**26 (44.1)**
Decision making	The child is capable of making his/her own choices and decisions, according to his/her interests	**14 (23.7)**
Areas	*Areas in which children participate inside the classroom*	
Transversal	Teachers consider participation occurs across all areas	**19 (32.2)**
Activities	*Classroom activities in which teachers consider it important for children to participate*	
All activities	Teachers consider it important for children to participate in all activities	**36 (61.0)**
Practices	*Practices associated with the promotion of child participation*	
Collaborate with families	Closely working with parents/families	7 (11.9)
Motivate	Manage the group, guide children and motivate them to participate	**37 (62.7)**
Listen	Listen to the opinions and ideas of children, consulting them on various topics	**29 (49.2)**
Plan	Plan all activities in advance, to include participation practices	6 (10.2)
Communication	Promote conversations, consulting and negotiating with children	**47 (79.7)**
Initiative	Promote children's initiative, autonomy, and responsibility in certain tasks/activities	**29 (49.2)**
Conflict resolution	Promote conflict resolution between children	**13 (22.0)**
Choice	Promote children's decision making and choice	**41 (69.5)**
Activities	Promote diverse and appealing activities	**26 (44.1)**
Democratic experiences	Promote opportunities for debating, voting, or participating in assemblies	**16 (27.1)**
Conditions	*Conditions needed to promote children's participation in the classroom*	
Environment	Classroom conditions (e.g., positive, enabling environment)	**19 (32.2)**
Intervenient characteristics	Adults (e.g., flexibility) or children's (e.g., shyness) characteristics	**34 (57.6)**
Adult listening competences	Adults' active listening competences	4 (6.8)
Parents cooperation	Parents' cooperation in promoting children's participation	7 (11.9)
Children's interaction	Children's receptivity, behaviour, and relationship with ECE teachers/staff	**15 (25.49)**
Teachers' motivation	Teachers' motivation, will, creativity, and imagination to promote children's participation	**16 (27.1)**
Framing by teacher	Teachers as agents of promotion and delimiters of spaces of participation	**13 (22.0)**
Time management	Good time management needed to put planning into practice	6 (10.2)
Resources	Human (i.e., number of adults) and material (i.e., variety, quantity, accessibility)	**29 (49.2)**
Obstacles	*Barriers and challenges to the implementation of children's right to participate*	
ECE setting	Organisational, bureaucratic, and educational (e.g., guidelines) impositions	**18 (30.5)**
Children	Children's characteristics (e.g., competences, behaviour, or temperament)	**43 (72.9)**

Teachers	Teachers' individual characteristics and perspectives	**14 (23.7)**
Group composition	Group heterogeneity (e.g., characteristics, developmental stages)	**15 (25.4)**
Familiar context	Familiar context as a facilitator of child participation	**19 (32.2)**
Resources	Lack of time, human and/or financial resources	**17 (28.8)**
No obstacles	No obstacles or challenges to the promotion of child participation	3 (5.1)
Differences between contexts	*Contexts (i.e., ECE, home) in which teachers consider that children participate the most*	
There are no differences	No differences between contexts	1 (1.7)
ECE setting	ECE is the context that most promotes child participation	**21 (35.6)**
Benefits	*Benefits that teachers anticipate for children, arising from their right to participate*	
Individual	Individual benefits	54 (91.5)
Self-esteem	Children value themselves, feel competent and confident	**27(45.8)**
Autonomy	Capacity to perform activities without supervision, on their own initiative	**17 (28.8)**
Wellbeing	Wellbeing, learning, and development	**40 (67.8)**
Self-regulation	Emotional intelligence and self-regulation (e.g., capacity to deal with frustration)	3 (5.1)
Cognitive processes	Higher-order thinking (e.g., problem resolution, decision making)	**25 (42.4)**
Interpersonal	Interpersonal benefits (e.g., communication, sense of belonging)	**33 (55.9)**
Disadvantages	*Disadvantages that teachers anticipate, arising from their right to participate*	3 (5.1)

Note. Categories in bold were selected for multiple correspondence analysis.

Based on MCA results, two principal dimensions were selected to sustain the profiles of teachers' ideas about children's participation. Firstly, the composition of each dimension was analysed. Table 2 shows the discrimination measures and contributions of the input variables (all the (sub)categories) for each dimension. Based on the variables with the highest discrimination measures, it is possible to conclude that Dimension 1 (i.e., with preponderance of variables referring to practices and teacher's motivation) enhanced teachers' practices and individual responsibility. In turn, variables involving benefits and outcomes at the child level contributed to structure Dimension 2 (i.e., varying from less general, more specific benefits such as children's autonomy and self-esteem, to more general benefits such as children's wellbeing) (Table 2).

Table 2

Discrimination measures and contributions of conceptual (Sub)categories

Conceptual (sub)categories – input variables	Dimensions			
	1		2	
	Discrimination measures	Contribution (%)	Discrimination measures	Contribution (%)
Transversal (A)	0.001	0.0	**0.172**	7.2
Self-esteem (B)	0.037	1.2	**0.310**	13.0
Autonomy (B)	**0.154**	5.2	**0.287**	12.0
Wellbeing (B)	**0.203**	6.9	**0.151**	6.3
Cognitive process (B)	0.138	4.7	**0.166**	6.9
Interpersonal (B)	0.040	1.4	<u>0.097</u>	4.1
Being heard (C)	**0.347**	11.8	0.006	0.2
Decision making (C)	0.076	2.6	<u>0.097</u>	4.1
Environment (CD)	0.064	2.2	<u>0.105</u>	4.4
Intervenient characteristics (CD)	**0.255**	8.7	0.022	0.9
Teacher's motivation (CD)	**0.217**	7.4	**0.123**	5.2
Framing by teacher (CD)	0.022	0.7	**0.269**	11.3
Resources (CD)	0.093	3.2	**0.122**	5.1
ECE setting (CT)	**0.316**	10.7	0.001	0.0
ECE setting (O)	<u>0.118</u>	4.0	0.008	0.3
Children (O)	0.024	0.8	<u>0.105</u>	4.4
Motivate (P)	**0.338**	11.5	0.108	4.5
Listen (P)	0.002	0.1	**0.220**	9.2
Choice (P)	**0.228**	7.7	0.006	0.2
Activities (P)	**0.268**	9.1	0.018	0.8
Total (eigenvalue)	2.942	100.0	2.393	100.0
Inertia (eigenvalue's mean)	0.147		0.120	

Note. For each dimension, discrimination measures above inertia were highlighted in bold. The values underlined were only slightly below the inertia and therefore were still considered. A = Areas, B = Benefits, C = Conceptions, CD = Conditions, CT = Context, P = Practices, O = Obstacles

The conjoint analysis of the two dimensions provided the topological configuration of teachers' ideas about children's right to participate (Figure 1). Four different privileged combinations between multiple categories were identified and therefore four profiles were defined.
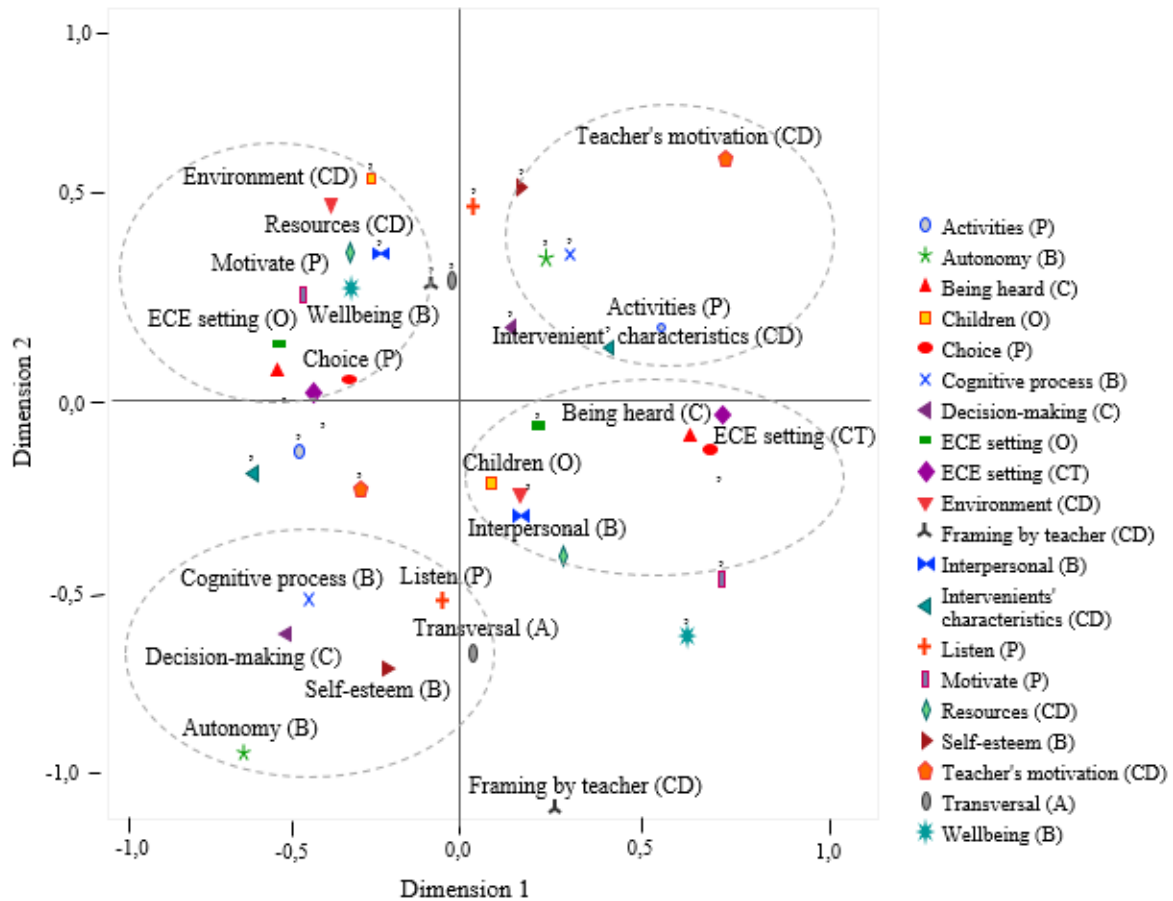
Figure 1

Topological configuration of teachers' profiles. Note: A = Areas, B = Benefits, C = Conceptions, CD = Conditions, CT = Context, P = Practices, O = Obstacles

Figure 2 shows the partition of the teachers in types (clusters) according to their profiles. The profile Teachers' Motivation (Type 1, 33.9%) showed an association between teachers' motivation (e.g., "I think it takes a lot of creativity, willingness, and from there everything is done", ECE teacher, 38 years old, 17 years of experience, private for-profit setting) and general benefits/outcomes at the child level ("Most of all, they [children] grow up in a healthy and trusting environment (…), they feel well (…), they grow up healthy", ECE teacher, 38 years old, 17 years of experience, private for-profit setting). The profile Teachers' Conditioned

Responsibility (Type 2, 22.0%) was characterized by teachers' individual responsibility (internal attribution) (e.g., "I think it has to do with the attitude, with the way the teacher looks at things, because it's always possible to get them to participate, isn't it? It depends on how each person understands what he/she is doing, the way each teacher conceives what he/she is doing", ECE teacher, 35 years old, 10 years of experience, public setting), and more specific benefits (i.e., interpersonal) at the child level ("Even if [the child] does not always lead, he/she knows that he/she is in a group, he/she may be even quieter, but he/she is with the group", ECE teacher, 35 years old, 10 years of experience, public setting). The profile Children's Benefits (Type 3, 18.6%) was focused on more specific, individual benefits (e.g., "It gives them a critical view, that is, they can express their opinion on certain issues, and they value themselves because they think they are important"; "Their self-esteem is valued and enhanced, because they intervene in a process of sharing knowledge", ECE teacher, 59 years old, 39 years of experience, public setting). Finally, the profile Context Dependent (Type 4, 25.4%) emphasized the context conditions and constraints (e.g., "It's essential to have two people in the classroom, otherwise we can't… we can't have a continuous work (…) it's the human resources... And the physical resources, for instance this setting has several gaps in terms of physical spaces", ECE teacher, 41 years old, 19 years of experience, public setting), and children's general wellbeing ("they become much more secure, calm, happy children who like to share their opinions", ECE teacher, 41 years old, 19 years of experience, public setting).
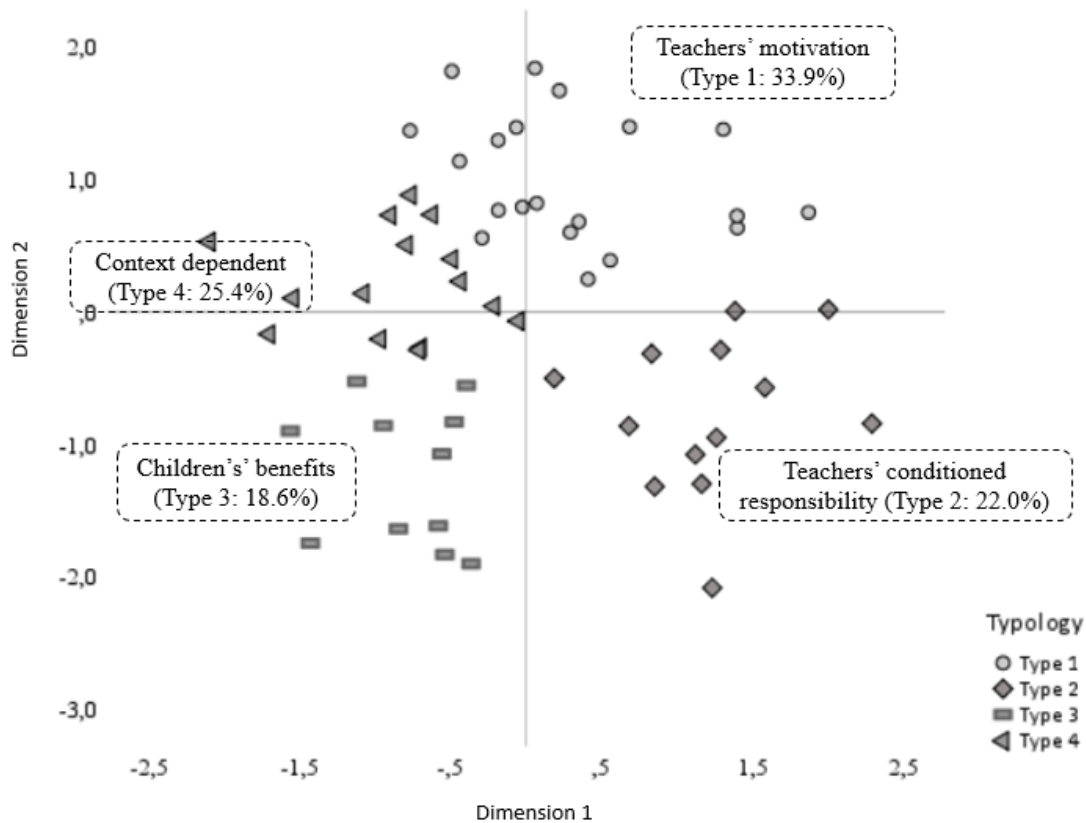
Figure 2

Teacher's type according to profiles

Finally, we tested the associations between the profiles of teachers' ideas about children's participation, teachers' individual characteristics, and features of the ECE context. Teachers' age was significantly associated with teacher profiles, $F(3, 54) = 6.186$, $p = .001$. Post hoc tests showed that type 3 – Children's Benefits and type 4 – Context Dependent teachers had significantly higher average age than type 2 – Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility ($M_{Type3} = 46.0$ and $M_{Type4} = 48.1$ versu$s$ $M_{Type2} = 36.2$, $p = .017$ and $p = .001$, respectively). Years of experience were also significantly related with teacher profiles, $F(3, 54) = 6.066$, $p = .001$. Type 2 teachers had significant lower average compared with the other three types ($M_{Type2} = 11.9$ *versus* $19.2 < M < 23.4$, $p = .045$, $p = .014$, and $p = .001$, respectively). The results showed a significant and noteworthy association between type of centre and teachers' profiles, $\chi^2(6) = 19.434$, $p = .003$, Cramer's V = .406 (Cohen 1992). In public centres, 44.8% of the teachers enhanced participation as Context Dependent (type 4). Teachers that focused on participation as Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility (type 2) stood out in private non-profit centres (50.0%). In private for-profit centres, about 44% of the teachers focused on

participation as a function of the Teacher's Motivation (type 1). No significant differences were found for group size nor for teachers' education ($p < .05$).

4. Discussion

This study examined ECE teachers' ideas about children's right to participate in centre-based ECE settings. We investigated how ECE teachers understand, value, and promote children's participation. Specifically, we aimed to identify profiles of Portuguese ECE teachers' ideas about children's right to participate, and to explore associations between teacher profiles and teachers' individual characteristics and ECE context variables.

4.1 Profiles of ECE teachers' ideas

We found four different profiles of Portuguese ECE teachers' ideas about children's right to participate. Generally, these profiles reflect distinct elements of participatory interactions: teachers (i.e., Teachers' Motivation), children (i.e., Children's Benefits), and context (i.e., Context Dependent). A fourth profile focused on a combination of teacher and children categories (i.e., Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility). This range of elements is consistent with the complexity of enacting children right to participate in ECE (Vieira, 2017).

Nearly a third of ECE teachers participating in this study focused on Teachers' Motivation, emphasizing the role of teachers' motivation and responsibility in promoting children's right to participate. Personal enjoyment and interest, together with goal-orientation, persistence, and planned efforts (e.g., Han & Yin, 2016; Robbins & Judge, 2008) towards the promotion of child participation may strengthen positive attitudes regarding children's self-initiated actions and the adoption of participatory approaches by teachers. Previous research suggests teachers' motivation and commitment to address children's perspectives are important requirements to enable children's participation (Johansson & Sandberg, 2010). Nevertheless, we should consider a different lens to discuss this focus on teacher's motivation: we must acknowledge that these teachers may not see children's participation as a key component of their professional mandate and overall mission but as an optional feature within teacher practices and, thus, dependent on teacher interests and commitment.

Although existent studies did not specifically address teachers' motivation to promote children's participation, the role of teachers' interest and skills to develop participatory practices (Kangas et al., 2016), and teachers' responsibility and prominent role as facilitators

of children's participation (Koran & Avci, 2017; Nah & Lee, 2016; Venninen & Leinonen, 2013) have been widely documented. Relatedly, teachers' motivating styles (i.e., from controlling to autonomy-supportive) influence teachers' sensitiveness and actions to encourage and sustain children's initiative, autonomy, and active involvement in activities (Reeve et al., 2009). For instance, although not specifically referring to ECE settings, autonomy-supportive teachers frequently take and value children's perspectives, thoughts, feelings, and actions, supporting children's autonomy and decision making. Moreover, an autonomy-supportive motivating style is teachable (Reeve, 1998, 2009), therefore teaching teachers about children's participation may be a productive endeavour.

Teachers in the second most represented profile, Context Dependent, give special attention to the contextual conditions and constraints that may influence the implementation of children's right to participate. These teachers valued the social environment and the human and material resources available as conditions to promote children's participation, which is consistent with previous research (Kangas et al., 2016; Nah & Lee, 2016; Venninen et al., 2014). In addition, teachers in this profile focused on the organizational, bureaucratic, and educational obstacles to the implementation of children's participation, extensively described by other authors (e.g., Thornberg & Elvstran, 2012).

Our findings support previous evidence on how children's participation depends on a wide range of job-related conditions (e.g., Ntoumanis & Standage, 2008). However, there are also broader societal forces and norms (Freire, 2010; Reeve, 2009), that were not mentioned by teachers in this study, and may prevent the adoption of participation practices (Taylor & Ntoumanis, 2007). Specifically, unlike reports from previous studies, Portuguese ECE teachers did not specifically address language and communication styles (Koran & Avci, 2017) nor long-standing hierarchical interaction patterns (Thornberg & Elvstran, 2012) as constraints. Teachers in this profile may benefit from professional development opportunities focusing on how to promote children's right to participate, overcoming obstacles and mobilizing organizational resources and supports, as well as from raising awareness of broader issues related to power and adult-child interactions.

Teachers in the Children's Benefits profile mostly focused on children's benefits, giving special attention to what makes participation worthwhile for individual children (e.g., self-esteem, autonomy, or higher-order thinking). These potential benefits of children's participation are consistent with extensive literature on the topic (e.g., Freitas Luís et al., 2015; Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Mesquita-Pires, 2012; Sinclair, 2004). However, other important benefits were not considered by participating teachers, including individual benefits such as

internalizing new values, developing social responsibility, active engagement, and meaningful learning (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000); teacher benefits (e.g., Nah & Lee, 2016); and community benefits (Hart, 1992; Kirby, Lanyon, & Cronin, 2003). We note, however, that the question posed during the interview, addressing participation benefits or disadvantages for children, may have conditioned teachers' answers, preventing the consideration of teacher or community-level benefits. It is noteworthy that this was the least frequently observed profile, suggesting the need to raise teachers' awareness on the potential multilevel benefits from promoting children's participation.

Lastly, in the Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility profile children's participation seemed to be perceived as a function of teachers' responsibility, considering child benefits at the interpersonal level and child-related obstacles. Specifically, and in line with previous research (Nah & Lee, 2016), teachers in this profile focused on benefits related to children's interpersonal relationships, such as communication, sense of belonging, and sense of responsibility. This profile seems to reflect a position, consistent with available evidence, according to which participatory interactions do not depend exclusively on teachers' responsibility and practices, but instead are a function of diverse interacting elements (Vieira, 2017).

Our findings illustrate discourses of ECE teachers from a traditionally western society. In western societies, discourses about children's rights tend to challenge ideologies of children as innocent or less competent to decide and exert influence (James & James, 2004). ECE teachers who participated in this study have diverse conceptions of children's right to participate, either reflecting its structural, individual, or more collective nature (Sousa & Oxley, 2019). Nonetheless, despite the growing recognition of children's right to participate, promoting children's participation remains a challenge (Lansdown, 2010; Prout, 2003), which is consistent with the high number of teachers focusing on the contextual constraints to the implementation of children's right to participate.

4.2 Associations between teacher profiles and individual and contextual variables

This study also aimed to investigate whether teacher's individual characteristics and contextual variables were associated with profiles of teachers' ideas. Regarding teacher's characteristics, teacher's profiles were associated with age and experience. Specifically, teachers in the profiles focusing on Children's Benefits and participation as Context Dependent were older than teachers in the profile focusing on Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility.

Relatedly, teachers in the Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility profile had fewer years of professional experience then teachers in the other three profiles. These findings are consistent with existing evidence that younger, less experienced teachers tend to have broader concerns about their activity (Melnick & Meister, 2008), considering the educational setting as a driving force where they have full responsibilities, demanding roles, and where they simultaneously interact with children (Flores, 2001). This may contribute for younger and less experienced teachers to perceive their responsibility as conditioned, paying attention to various dimensions of children's participation. Older teachers, in turn, seem to have concerns with specific constraints, such as classroom management and time management (Melnick & Meister, 2008).

As for the contextual variables, our findings seem to reflect the fact that teachers' ideas are shaped by nature of the contexts in which they work in. In public centres, almost half of the participating teachers enhanced participation as Context Dependent, which may reflect the conditions and constraints teachers encounter in these settings (e.g., bureaucracy). Previous research suggests technocratic language and negotiating styles may function as obstacles to the integration of children's voices in public spaces (Sarmento, Fernandes, & Tomás. 2007). Moreover, within the public context, Portuguese ECE teachers' beliefs seem to reflect rules and structures predetermined by adults, focusing on preparing children for future life and schooling, with fewer opportunities for children's choice (Sousa & Oxley, 2019). Importantly, previous research shows Portuguese ECE teachers in the public ECE sector are typically older (Pinto et al., 2014), which may help explain these findings.

In private non-profit centres, half of the teachers were represented in the Teachers Conditioned Responsibility profile. In Portugal, private non-profit centres generally aim at providing access and equal opportunities for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, reducing social inequalities (Sousa & Oxley, 2019). It seems consistent with this mission, that in addition to their responsibility, teachers also consider children's benefits and child-level obstacles in their views on implementing children's right to participate. In private for-profit centres, almost half of the teachers focused on participation as a function of Teacher's Motivation. These settings may be particularly sensitive to family expectations regarding children's achievement and not prioritize participatory practices, thus influencing teachers' objectives and actions (Hyson, Hirsh-Pasek, & Rescorla, 1990; Stipek & Byler, 1997). For this reason, in these cases, teachers' interest and motivation towards participation may be fundamental to effectively implement children's right to exert influence.

Unlike previous studies, we did not find associations between teachers' profiles and teachers' education and group size (e.g., Lopes, Correia, and Aguiar, 2016; Venninen et al.,

2014). In Portugal, there is little variation in teachers' education, with all teachers holding a higher education degree in early childhood education, which might help explain these findings.

4.3 Limitations

In this study, we drew on qualitative data to understand the structure of teachers' ideas about children's right to participate in ECE. However, our findings are dependent on the content analysis previously conducted and the category system obtained. As a result, and despite the rigour in all different stages (e.g., recruitment, coding, analysis, and reliability checks) of the content analysis, some limitations might arise from data examination and interpretation.

Another possible limitation of this study arises from the fact that it was conducted in an area of the south of Portugal. Furthermore, participants were exclusively women, reflecting the limited male representation in the ECE workforce (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, 2019), teaching in urban and semi-urban ECE settings serving children aged between 3 and 6 years-old. Future research should investigate teachers' ideas in different geographical areas, including rural populations. It would be also relevant to investigate teachers' ideas about the right to participate of younger children.

Finally, we documented teachers' ideas about children's right to participate in a traditionally collectivistic society. Given that culture informs teachers' beliefs towards more controlling or child-initiative supporting approaches (Reeve et al., 2014), future research could address cross-country comparisons, including teachers in more individualistic cultures.

5. Conclusions and implications

In this study, we collected data on different dimensions of participation (i.e., conceptualizations, conditions, obstacles, practices, and benefits), obtaining complex configurations of teachers' ideas and, thus, adding to existing evidence. Moreover, we documented the ideas of a diverse group of Portuguese teachers, including both younger and experienced teachers, using a diversity of pedagogical approaches.

The identification of these profiles supports our understanding of Portuguese ECE teachers' positioning and priorities towards the promotion of children's right to participate. Our findings echo results from previous studies, but also provide new insights to the field. Specifically, we now know that for some teachers (especially younger teachers and teachers

serving in private centres) their motivation and individual responsibility for creating conditions for children's participation is particularly salient, whereas other teachers (particularly those serving in public settings and those who are older and more experienced) seem to emphasize contextual constraints to the implementation of child participation, without a focus on the benefits arising from participation, both for children and teachers. For other teachers, although fewer, their ideas on children's participation focus on potential individual benefits for children. Future research may now link these profiles of teachers' ideas with teachers' practices to promote children's participation in ECE, while simultaneously investigating associations with ECE process quality. For now, practical implications of these findings point towards the importance of designing tailored professional development initiatives informed by the structure of teachers' ideas. Based on our findings, a multilevel, comprehensive professional development approach targeting ECE teachers may be necessary to strengthen practitioners' knowledge on children's right to participate, reinforcing teachers' autonomy, and mobilizing organizational resources towards the effective implementation of this right.

6. References

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CHAPTER V | ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN TEACHERS' IDEAS, PRACTICES AND CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS:

TEACHERS' PRACTICES MEDIATE THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN TEACHER'S IDEAS AND CHILDREN'S PERCEIVED PARTICIPATION IN ECE[4]

Abstract

Participation is a fundamental right of all children. Its promotion is considered a key investment in children's wellbeing, crucial to support high-quality early childhood education (ECE). In this study we aimed to investigate if ECE teachers' ideas on children's participation were associated with children's perceived participation, analysing the mediating role of teachers' practices and dimensions of process quality. Participants in this quantitative study were 336 children (163 boys) aged between 44 and 84 months, and 58 ECE teachers (all female) aged between 26 and 60 years old, from 24 randomly selected ECE centres in the Lisbon metropolitan area. Using multilevel modelling, given the hierarchical structure of data, we found that ECE teachers' ideas about participation do influence children's perceived participation, through teachers' perceived practices. Further, ECE teachers' perceived participation practices were associated with children's perceived participation, through observed participation practices and observed process quality. This study suggests the interdependence of the subjective and objective properties of ECE classrooms, and how both should inform our understanding of the conditions needed to promote children's participation.

Keywords: Right to participate, participation, Early childhood education, Teachers' ideas, Teachers' practices, Children's perceived participation

1. Introduction

Participation is a fundamental right of all children and its promotion is considered a key investment in children's wellbeing (European Commission, 2013). Participation refers to children's right to freely express themselves and to experience respect and consideration for their intentions and views in everyday life. The recognition of children's right to participate was driven by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, specifically in its Article 12 (CRC; United Nations General Assembly, 1989). The CRC does not set a minimum age, nor does it limit the contexts in which children can express their views. Instead, children's participation is recommended from an early age, in all issues affecting them (Council of Europe, 2017), and according to General Comment No. 7, it should be implemented in early childhood (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005).

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Early childhood education (ECE) settings are fundamental microsystems in young children's lives (e.g., Melhuish, 2014) and ECE teachers play a crucial role in promoting children's participation (Lundy, 2007). Therefore, in this study, we aimed to extend previous research by examining how ECE teachers perceive and, through their practices, support children's participation rights. We considered children's perspectives, by investigating whether children's perceived participation was associated with teachers' ideas and practices. So far, to the best of our knowledge, no study investigated ECE teachers' ideas and children's perceived participation simultaneously, nor tested associations between them. In addition, we added to the limited research on ECE quality and children's participation rights (e.g., Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001), by investigating whether ECE teachers' ideas on children's participation were associated with children's perceived participation, while analysing the mediating role of teachers' practices and dimensions of process quality.

1.1. Children's right to participate and ECE quality

Children's right to participate is fundamental to the creation of a positive social climate in educational settings, promoting child-centred learning (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009). Therefore, the implementation of children's right to participate has been described as a key indicator of high-quality ECE (e.g., Moser, Leseman, Melhuish, Broekhuizen, & Slot, 2017; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). ECE quality involves both structural (e.g., regulatable features such as number of trained staff) and process features (i.e., experiences afforded children such as teacher-child interactions and curriculum), with the former setting the conditions for high-quality process quality, and the latter setting the conditions for child development (Moser et al., 2017). Therefore, in this study, we focus on the promotion of children's right to participate as a feature of high-quality process quality.

Participation challenges traditional conceptions of teacher-child interactions, and the status of children and ECE professionals, leading to the redefinition of their roles, expectations, and practices (Bae, 2012). ECE teachers are pivotal in creating opportunities for meaningful participation for all children, by considering their perspectives and promoting their initiative and decision making (Doverborg & Pramling, 1993; Save the Children, 2005). Therefore, understanding teachers' ideas and practices is key for improving educational processes (OECD, 2009).

The consideration of both ideas and practices is consistent with the bioecological model, which posits that contexts of human development include both objective properties (e.g.,

observed ECE teacher practices) and subjective experiences (e.g., ECE teachers' ideas; children's perceived participation) of those properties (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Within this theory, the construct of proximal processes (i.e., forms of interaction between organisms and the environment as primary mechanisms for human development) is also relevant to understand participation. Indeed, proximal processes (e.g., teacher-child interactions) vary as a function of the characteristics of the developing person (i.e., dispositions), of the immediate or more remote contexts (including the ECE microsystem), and the time periods in which they take place (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Improving the quality of the environment has been shown to increase the developmental power of proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Relatedly, microsystems characterized by enduring reciprocal relationships are those in which development is enhanced. Specifically, high-quality ECE settings offer opportunities for children's participation through reciprocal teacher-child interactions. On the contrary, ECE microsystems characterized by a restricted range of activities and impoverished experiences, for instance in terms of reciprocity, contribute to developmental risk (Garbarino & Ganzel, 2000).

1.2. Teachers' ideas about children's right to participate in ECE

Ideas are mental representations that may include values, beliefs, conceptions, expectations, or perceptions (Sigel, 1985). Previous studies on ECE teachers' ideas about children's right to participate reflect different levels of participation, as proposed by Hart (1992), from children being part of a group and being listened to (e.g., Johansson & Sandberg, 2010); to participation in planning and decision making (Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010; Turnšek, 2008; Zorec, 2015); or initiating independent activity and choice with teachers' support (Broström et al., 2015). Self-determination and management of everyday life are considered by ECE professionals as strong indicators of high participation, promoting children's sense of coherence and comprehension of what surrounds them (Sandberg & Erikson, 2010).

Teachers' ideas seem to be associated with ECE quality. Sheridan (2007) reported that teachers from high-quality settings held themselves responsible for including children in decision making, while teachers from low-quality ECE settings highlighted external factors as obstacles hindering their interactions with children. Importantly, while associations between teachers' ideas (e.g., beliefs) and teachers' practices have been documented (e.g., Fives & Buehl, 2012), available evidence is mixed. On the one hand, there is research showing congruence between teachers' beliefs and practices, suggesting that teachers' beliefs have

implications for their decisions and practices (e.g., Hegde & Cassidy, 2009). On the other hand, there is research showing inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and observed classroom practices (e.g., Wilcox-Herzog, 2002), suggesting that the association between ECE teachers' beliefs and practices might be also influenced by teacher and context characteristics (Wilcox-Herzog, Ward, Wong, & McLaren, 2015).

Nevertheless, there is some evidence suggesting that ECE teachers' beliefs about children's right to participate may be associated with the adoption of participation practices (Samuelsson, Sheridan, & Williams, 2006). For instance, ECE teachers with child-centred beliefs are more sensitive to children's perspectives, promoting more opportunities for children's participation (Koran & Avci, 2017). Likewise, when teachers understand and reflect upon the complexities of children's participation, they are more likely to match their purposes and practices, effectively promoting children's right to participate (Niemi, 2019; Sinclair, 2004).

1.3. Teachers' practices towards the promotion of children's right to participate in ECE

Among the few studies addressing teachers' practices towards the promotion of children's participation (Correia, Camilo, Aguiar, & Amaro, 2019), some noted the importance of teacher-child interactions. Specifically, there is evidence suggesting the importance of teachers' sensitivity (e.g., Freitas Luís, Andrade, & Santos, 2015; Mesquita-Pires, 2012; Pettersson, 2015; Salminen, 2013), active listening, reinforcement of children's talk (Alasuutari, 2014; Theobald & Kultti, 2012; Tholin & Jansen, 2012), and stimulation of discussions based on common rules and effective classroom management (Salminen, 2013). Presentations of children's work (Knauf, 2017; Pettersson, 2015) or children's participation in the resolution of peer disputes (Mashford-Scott & Church, 2011) are also examples of practices to promote children's voice and expression of interests. In addition, free play (Freitas Luís et al., 2015) and active experiences (Nah & Lee, 2016) are also described as favouring children's participation.

Practices limiting children's participation in ECE reflect teachers' greater agentic status and power imbalances in teacher-child interactions (e.g., Alasuutari, 2014; Mashford-Scott & Church, 2011; Pettersson, 2015; Salminen, 2013). Importantly, extant research on teachers' motivating styles, from highly controlling to highly autonomy-supportive, describes them as potential predictors of teachers' sensitiveness, and consequently of the promotion of children's initiative and participation (Reeve, 2009).

Variations in ECE process quality (e.g., from warm and responsive, to more distant and controlling teacher-child interactions) seem to be associated with unequal conditions for children's participation (Bae, 2012). Specifically, teachers in high-quality ECE settings focus more on children's voices and initiatives, and promote more opportunities for children's participation (e.g., Freitas Luís et al., 2015; Houen, Danby, Farrell, & Thorpe, 2016; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). Further, practices predominantly characterized by decision making by the adult, restricting children's participation, seem to be negatively associated with observed process quality (Lopes, Correia, & Aguiar, 2016) (cf. Appendix).

1.4. Children' perceptions about their right to participate in ECE

Encouraging children's voices and being attuned to their experiences may enhance children's engagement and capacities to contribute to decision making processes (Harris, Spina, Ehrich, & Smeed, 2013), while fostering their agency and wellbeing (Hart & Brando, 2018). Previous studies with older children (i.e., aged 11 - 14 years old) suggested that children reporting higher levels of perceived participation had better subjective wellbeing (Casas, Bello, González, & Aligué, 2013), particularly regarding social relations and autonomy (Lloyd & Emerson, 2017). In ECE, positive associations between children's perceived participation and their subjective wellbeing were reported in one study, with children reporting liking and being happier in their classroom when experiencing participation (Sandseter & Seland, 2016). Importantly, participatory classrooms are perceived by children as those in which they can freely engage with and use different areas and materials without having to ask for ECE staff's approval, or as those where they may refuse staff proposals (Sandseter & Seland, 2016). Also, they are perceived as the one's children like the most and in which they expect to have more opportunities to make choices, feel better, and have more fun (Correia & Aguiar, 2017).

Existing research, though scarce, suggests that features of ECE settings, such as an enabling environment (i.e., valuing children's motivations and interests), and the extent to which teachers support and promote participation, shape children's perceptions of participation (e.g., Oliveira-Formosinho & Lino, 2008; Smith, 2002). For instance, children describe education settings based on the features of their teachers, from stricter and focused on maintaining order, to more sensitive and autonomy supportive (Oliveira-Formosinho & Lino, 2008). Moreover, one study described variations in children's perceptions as a function of ECE process quality (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). Specifically, children in high-quality settings reported to a larger extent that they were listened to and that teachers knew what they liked to

do (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001), reporting more opportunities to participate and exert influence (Sheridan, 2007).

Previous research has reported gender effects on school-aged (i.e., 10 and 11 years old) children's ideas, with girls reporting more positive perceptions of their participation rights than boys (Lloyd & Emerson, 2017). However, the few studies involving preschool-aged children did not find gender or age differences (Correia & Aguiar, 2017). Importantly, empirical evidence on children's ideas and experiences related to participation in ECE is still scarce (e.g., Correia & Aguiar, 2017; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001).

1.5. The Portuguese context: Policies about children's right to participate in ECE

Portugal ratified the CRC in 1990. Since then, several efforts were made, at the legal, political, and practical level, towards the promotion of children's rights, including children's right to participate (Araújo & Fernandes, 2016). Specifically, over the last 30 years, extensive investments were made in ECE (Abreu-Lima, Leal, Cadima, & Gamelas, 2013), which is currently available from age 3 until the age of compulsory education (i.e., 6 years by September 15th) (Law No. 4/97). Although ECE is optional, universal access is mandated from the age of 4 (Law No. 65/2015). Consequently, as in most high-income countries, ECE enrollment in Portugal currently exceeds 90% (OECD, 2018; UNICEF, 2019). Specifically, coverage rates are 82.8%, 93.1%, and 94% for 3, 4 and 5-year-olds, respectively (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, 2019).

ECE provision in Portugal is under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and encompasses public, private for-profit, and private non-profit centers. In the school year of 2017/2018, 53.1% of children attending preschool in Portugal were enrolled in public settings, 30.7% were enrolled in private non-profit settings, and 16.2% were enrolled in for-profit settings (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, 2018). Children normally attend ECE centres for a minimum of 5 hours per day, five days a week, which corresponds to the free educational component in public and private non-profit centres. Importantly, the minimum qualification required to be an ECE teacher is a Masters' degree (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019).

The Portuguese Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education (Lopes da Silva, Marques, Mata, & Rosa, 2016), which support teachers across the national ECE network, explicitly recognize children as subjects and agents within the educational process, stating the need to listen to them, taking their perspectives seriously, and ensuring their participation in

decisions pertaining to them (e.g., planning, evaluation). Similarly, existing legal documents such as the Framework Law for Preschool Education (Law No. 4/97), the specific (Decree-Law No. 241/2001), and the general profile of ECE teachers in Portugal (Decree-Law No. 240/2001) recommend the promotion of children's active participation, for instance in the development and implementation of shared rules, within a framework of democratic citizenship.

Recently, Portugal ranked second on the Kids Rights Index 2019 (Kids Rights Foundation, 2019), which considers the right to life, health, education, protection, and an enabling environment for children's rights (e.g., including respect for children's views and children's participation). Nonetheless, the European Commission (2013) has pointed to the lack of visibility and awareness of participation rights in several countries, including Portugal (Eurochild, 2015). In addition, existing studies have suggested low to moderate (Aguiar, Aguiar, Cadima, Correia, & Fialho, 2019; Pinto, Pessanha, & Aguiar, 2013) mean levels of quality in Portuguese ECE settings. These levels might prevent Portuguese ECE classrooms from positively impacting children's development (Abreu-Lima et al., 2013), and given the proposed associations between ECE quality and child participation (Sheridan, 2007; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001), they might also compromise the implementation of this right.

1.6. The current study

In a recent study, we investigated ECE teachers' ideas about children's right to participate, and identified four groups of teachers: (1) a group of teachers focusing on Teachers' Motivation (Type 1), referred to participation as depending on teachers' action and motivation; (2) a group of teachers focusing on Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility (Type 2), considered participation as a function of teachers' responsibility, but also as a function of children's benefits and child-related obstacles; (3) a group of teachers focusing on Children's Benefits (Type 3), emphasized specific individual benefits for children; and (4) a group of teachers saw participation as Context Dependent (Type 4), focusing on the contextual constraints and obstacles to children's participation (Correia, Carvalho, & Aguiar, 2019). Generally, these profiles reflected distinct elements of participatory interactions: teachers (i.e., Teachers' Motivation), children (i.e., Children's Benefits), and the context (i.e., Context Dependent). In the current study, we analysed the associations between these four profiles of ECE teachers' ideas and young children's perceived participation in centre-based ECE settings. Further, we

investigated if these associations were mediated by teachers' practices, including observed participation practices and classroom process quality.

By pursuing these goals, we addressed multiple gaps in the scarce literature on children's right to participate in ECE. For instance, we focused on children's perceived participation as an outcome, answering the call for more research considering children's perspectives (James, 2007). Moreover, to our knowledge, no study has addressed both teachers' ideas and children's perceived participation, nor investigated associations between them. Importantly, no studies have examined the associations between participation practices, classroom process quality, and children's perceived participation (Lansdown, 2010). Most studies have relied on a single level of analyses, focusing mostly on ECE teachers' ideas about children's right to participate and far less on observed practices, with very few studies examining both (Nah & Lee, 2016; Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012). Therefore, we extend existing research by considering both ideas and practices, teacher and child reports, as well as self-reported and observed practices.

We expected ECE teachers' profiles of ideas regarding children's right to participate to be directly associated with children's perceived participation in their classroom (H1). We also expected the associations between teachers' profiles and children's perceived participation to be mediated by teachers' reports of practices promoting children's participation (H2). Further, we expected a positive association between ECE teachers' reports of participation practices, and children's perceived participation (H3), mediated by independent observations of participation practices (H4). We also expected that process quality mediated the association between ECE teachers' reports of participation practices, and children's perceived participation (H5). Hypotheses are schematized in Figure 1.
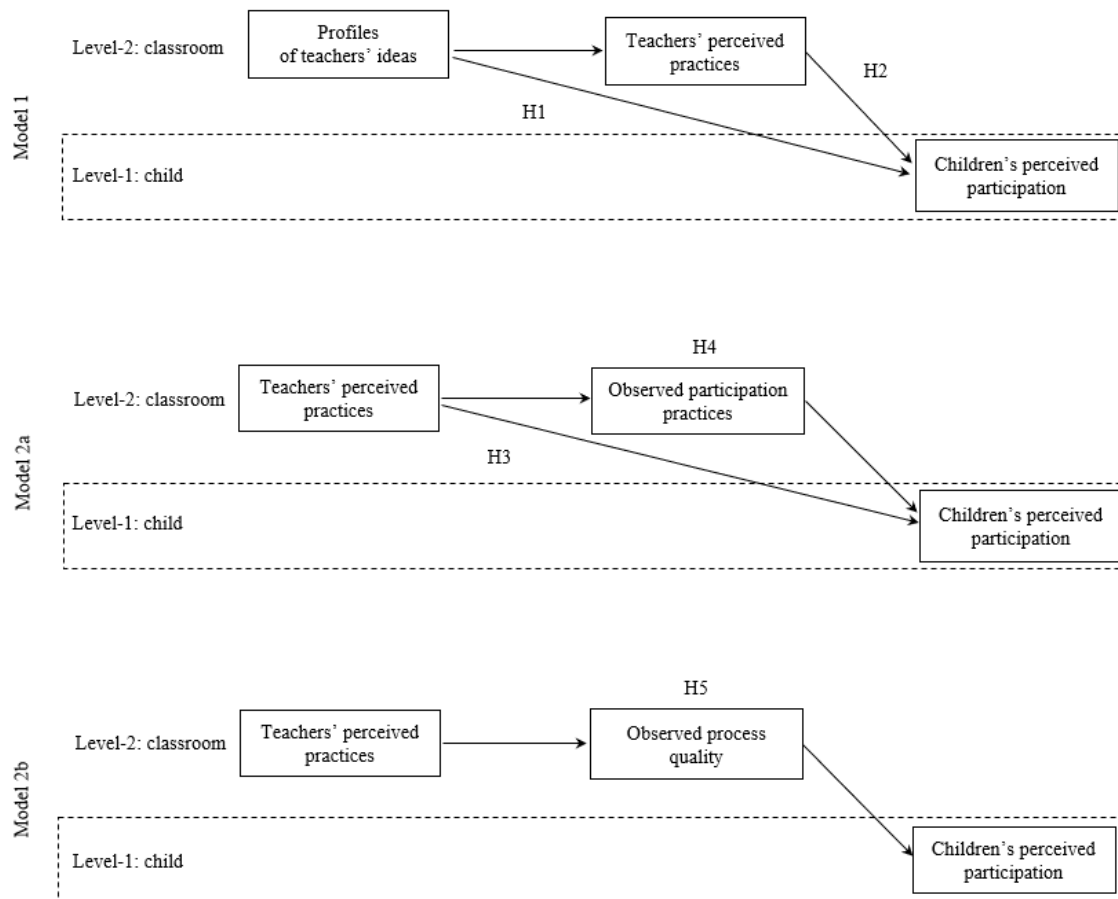
Figure 1. Hypothesized associations among variables.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 336 children (163 boys), aged between 44 and 84 months ($M = 63.74$, $SD = 8.05$). Mothers' education varied considerably: 58.0% had a university degree, 18.8% completed high-school, and 20.8% did not complete high-school (i.e., had less than 12 years of schooling). Information was missing for 2.4% of mothers.

Participants also included 58 ECE teachers (all female), aged between 26 and 60 years old ($M = 43.07$, $SD = 8.58$), with professional experience ranging between 2 and 39 years ($M = 19$, $SD = 8.36$). Teachers were responsible for groups with 8 to 27 children ($M = 20.79$, $SD = 4.21$), with 75.9% of participating classrooms serving mixed-aged groups (i.e., children from 3 to 6 years-old), which is consistent with the national landscape (Abreu-Lima et al., 2013). All teachers had at least a higher-education degree in early childhood education or equivalent,

with 12.1% holding a Masters' degree. Nearly a third (19.0%) had a specialization course (e.g., early childhood intervention, special education, Waldorf pedagogy).

Participating teachers were responsible for 58 ECE classrooms from 24 randomly selected ECE centres located in the metropolitan area of Lisbon (AML, 2019). This area, which corresponds to 36.7% of the Portuguese population (Pinto et al., 2013), is classified as a 'non-interior' or littoral territory, composed of urban and semi-urban areas (Conselho Nacional de Educação, 2018). Classrooms were predominantly from the public sector (48.3%), but also from private for-profit centres (27.6%) and private non-profit centres (24.1%). The type of institution followed the population distribution, $\chi^2(2) = 4.38$, $p = .115$, $N = 58$.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Teachers' ideas about children's right to participate

We assessed teachers' multidimensional ideas about children's right to participate (i.e., conceptions, practices, conditions, obstacles, and potential benefits) with an interview specifically designed for the purpose (see Correia, Carvalho, & Aguiar, 2019). After content analysis, a multiple correspondence analysis was used to identify profiles of teachers' ideas and then a cluster analysis allowed us to group teachers according to their profiles: Teachers' Motivation (Type 1, 34.5%), Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility (Type 2, 22.4%), Children's Benefits (Type 3, 19.0%), and Context Dependent (Type 4, 24.1%) (see Correia, Carvalho, & Aguiar, 2019). Teacher profile was used as a categorical predictor (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Profiles of teachers' ideas about children's right to participate in ECE.

2.2.2. Teachers' perceived participation practices

We assessed teachers' perceptions of their practices to promote children's participation with the Teachers' Perceived Participation Practices Scale (TPPP), composed of 26 items rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *not typical* to 5 = *extremely typical*). An exploratory factor analysis (EFA, principal components) was conducted with varimax rotation to identify the factorial structure. Kaiser criterion and parallel analysis (Costello & Osborne, 2005; O'Connor, 2000) converged in a two-factor solution. As described in Table 1, the two factors obtained were Children's Expression and Responsibility (12 items; factor loadings between .48 and .78), referring to teachers' practices contributing to the implementation of children's participation, and Decision Making by the Adult (six items; factor loadings between .62 and .79), reflecting teacher practices restricting children's participation. Both factors presented good internal consistency (α Children's Expression and Responsibility = .84; α Decision Making by the Adult = .78) and were moderately correlated (r = -.31) (Cohen, 1992).

Table 1

Factor loadings for exploratory factor analysis of two components of teachers perceived participation practices (N = 58)

In my classroom…	Children's Expression and Responsibility	Decision Making by the Adult
I include children's interests and ideas in my goals and planning	**.776**	-.046
I create daily opportunities for children to express their ideas and opinions	**.758**	-.017
Children participate in the evaluation of our work	**.705**	-.037
I provide daily opportunities for children to share their personal experiences during group activities	**.661**	-.058
Rules for common life are set with the children	**.613**	-.141
Children are responsible for daily tasks needed for collective life	**.585**	.009
Children make proposals of activities and play to the adults	**.585**	-.280
Children participate in the definition of classroom tasks	**.551**	-.054
Children choose their play	**.545**	-.297
Children have freedom of movement and may decide where to play/work	**.509**	-.249
Problems are debated in group, so that children find their own solutions	**.490**	-.018
Children are responsible for documenting the activities they choose	**.482**	-.333
I define the activity plan to ensure that my goals for the group are met	-.206	**.786**
I set the rules that children must follow	-.078	**.710**
I decide how areas and materials are organized, based on classroom space and my goals for the group	.030	**.659**
All children to the same work, with the same materials	-.235	**.641**
The schedule is set by me or the center coordination and children know they must comply	.124	**.639**
Children participate in decision making about the center's organization/dynamics (*reverse*)	-.294	**.617**
Eigenvalues	4.079	3.126
Explained variance (%)	26.160	17.367

Note. Principal component analysis with varimax rotation. Factor loadings ≥ 0.50 are in bold.

2.2.3. Observed teachers' participation practices

We assessed teachers' implementation of participation practices, with the Observed Teachers' Participation Practices Scale (OTPP), an observation measure composed of 13 items

rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *not typical* to 5 = *extremely typical*). An EFA (principal components and varimax rotation) was conducted to identify the factorial structure, resulting in 10 items organised in two factors (informed by the Kaiser criterion and a parallel analysis). Three items (i.e., "Children have the opportunity to express their ideas, opinions, and personal experiences", "Most of the materials exhibited were elaborated by children", "The teacher changes his/her plans to develop activities related to children's interests") were dropped due to cross loadings. As described in Table 2, the two factors obtained were Observed Children's Choice (5 items; factor loadings between .62 and .93, α = .92), reflecting observed practices to promote children's choice and initiative and Observed Conditions for Participation (5 items; factor loadings between .55 and .78; α =.74), referring to conditions enhancing participation.

Table 2
Factor loadings for exploratory factor analysis of two components of teachers observed participation practices (N = 58)

In this classroom…	Observed Children's Choice	Observed Conditions for Participation
Children choose activities and play in which they want to participate	**.930**	.163
Children have freedom of movement and may decide where to play/work	**.929**	.171
Children choose the peers with whom they want to play	**.888**	.057
Children choose the materials they use in the activities	**.829**	.261
Children make proposals of activities and play to the adults	**.618**	.415
Problems are debated in group, so that children find their own solutions	.115	**.777**
Materials in the classroom are diverse (i.e., each child's work is individualized, with materials and elements chosen by the child)	.279	**.754**
Exposed works and materials are at the child level and reach	.289	**.680**
Children are responsible for daily tasks needed for collective life (e.g., feeding a pet, documenting attendance)	.188	**.653**
Children are responsible for documenting the activities they choose	-.010	**.554**
Eigenvalues	3.797	2.668
Explained variance (%)	37.971	26.684

Note. Principal component analysis with varimax rotation. Factor loadings > 0.50 are in bold.

2.2.4. Observed process quality

We assessed classroom process quality with the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, Pre-K version (CLASS; Pianta, LaParo, & Hamre, 2008). The CLASS comprises 10 dimensions, coded on a 7-point scale (1 - 2 = *low quality,* 3 - 5 = *middle quality,* and 6 - 7 = *high quality*). A confirmatory factorial analysis (CFA) was used to confirm the factorial structure. Given the item-level ordered categorical data, a robust estimation method was chosen – the diagonal weighted least squares (DWLS) (Muthén & Satorra, 1995). The three-factor model supported the original structure, providing a good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011): χ^2 (32) = 69.219, $p < .001$; χ^2/df = 2.163; CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.97; RMSEA= 0.14; and SRMR = 0.11). Although RMSEA and SRMR were relatively high, this was likely due to the small sample size, as reported by Kenny, Kaniskan, & McCoach (2015) for $N \leq 100$. Nevertheless, the results of the most commonly reported fit indices validated the quality of the CFA solution. CLASS is organised in three domains: Emotional Support (α = .88) comprises the dimensions Positive climate, Negative climate (reversed), Teacher sensitivity, and Regard for student perspectives (standardized factor loadings between .78 and .98); Classroom Organization (α = .60, and mean inter-item correlation = .35, within the recommended range .15 – .50; Clark & Watson, 1995) includes the dimensions Behaviour management, Productivity, and Instructional learning formats (standardized factor loadings between .50 and .62); and Instructional Support (α = .84) includes the dimensions Concept development, Quality of feedback, and Language modelling (standardized factor loadings between .67 and .96).

2.2.5. Children's perceived participation

We assessed children's ideas about their own right to participate with "Choosing classrooms: A structured interview on children's right to participate", an interview protocol involving the presentation of two illustrative images and narratives (i.e., participation and non-participation) (see Correia & Aguiar, 2017). In this study, we used three questions specifically aiming to assess children's perceptions about their participation, by eliciting comparisons with the child's own classroom ("which classroom is most similar to yours?"), own teacher ("which teacher is most similar to yours?"), and asking about the child's opportunities to participate during that day ("what did you do, and who decided/chose?"). Answers were coded in terms

of absence vs. presence (0 = *non-participation,* 1 = *participation*), and a new variable that counted the number of participation responses, ranging from 0 to 3, was computed.

2.3. Procedure

This study was conducted within a broader research project, "Children's right to participate in early childhood education: From rights to empirical evidence". The project was approved by the National Data Protection Commission and the Institutional Review Board at ISCTE-IUL. Recruitment and data collection were conducted during the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 school years (i.e., approximately half during the first year, and the other half during the second). All ECE settings were randomly selected from existing public databases. In total, 170 ECE settings (i.e., school boards) of the metropolitan area of Lisbon were contacted, trying to assure representativeness of the different ECE types of settings in Portugal (Direcção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, 2019). A response rate of 19.4% was achieved, resulting in meetings with 33 ECE settings (i.e., 11 public, 13 private for-profit, and 9 private non-profit) to provide information about project aims and procedures. From these, we obtained a participation rate of 72.7%, resulting in data collection in 58 ECE classrooms from 24 ECE settings. In each classroom, ECE teachers and the parents of all child participants signed informed consent forms. All participating children provided verbal assent.

Teacher interviews (for interview protocol see Correia, Carvalho, & Aguiar, 2019) were conducted individually in a designated room, in the ECE setting, between November and January. Interviews were conducted by the first and third authors, as well as a research assistant. All three had a Masters' degree in Psychology or Social Sciences. Teachers' reports of participation practices, observed participation practices, and observed process quality, as well as children's perceived participation were collected between February and June.

In each classroom, six typically developing children were randomly selected, based on age and gender. The aim was to interview three boys and three girls in each classroom (i.e., to ensure gender balance), aged preferably 4 to 6 years-old (i.e., to increase the validity of sociometric data not used for the purposes of this study), although it was not possible to strictly follow these criteria in all classrooms. Children's interviews were conducted individually by the first and third authors, in a private room in the ECE setting, lasting from 15 to 20 min.

Observations of participation practices were conducted by two observers (i.e., the first and third authors) during a typical morning (i.e., approximately 2hrs). Reliability checks were performed in 25% of classrooms, resulting in Intraclass Correlation Coefficients (ICCs; two-

way mixed-effects model, single measures, consistency) of .61 (Observed Conditions for Participation) and .70 (Observed Children's Choice). Mean interrater percent agreement within-1 point was 92.0% for Observed Conditions for Participation, and 92.0% for Observed Children's Choice. Process quality observations took place during the same morning, by the first and third authors, who were certified CLASS Pre-K observers. In each classroom, four observation cycles were conducted, each lasting about 30 min (i.e., 20 min of coding, followed by 10 min of scoring). For each dimension, the mean score across the four cycles was calculated and computed. In addition, the two certified observers responsible for all observations also conducted reliability checks in 25% of classrooms, resulting in ICCs (two-way mixed-effects model, single measures, consistency) ranging from .34 (Instructional Support) to .75 (Emotional Support). Mean interrater percent agreement within-1 point was 97.0% for Emotional Support, 94.0% for Classroom Organization, and 100.0% for Instructional Support.

2.4. Data analysis

We first computed descriptive statistics and measures of association (eta coefficient and Person's correlation) among study variables. To test our hypotheses, we used multilevel modelling as our data had a hierarchical structure: children nested in classrooms (Hox, 2010; Snijders & Bosker, 2003). We used mixed-effects models to test the upper level mediation (2 → 2 → 1), since the effect of Level-2 predictors on Level-1 outcomes was mediated by Level-2 mediators (Bauer, Preacher, & Gil, 2006). Given that all the mediator models included multiple parallel mediators (Preacher & Hayes, 2008), multicollinearity was also checked. To test indirect effects, parametric bootstrapping was used to create confidence intervals (CIs) in *R* (Preacher & Selig, 2012). As the profiles of teachers' ideas were coded as a categorical variable, dummy coding was used to examine the comparisons between the four categories and, therefore, several multiple regressions were conducted, sequentially alternating the reference category.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive statistics and associations

Means, standard deviations, and associations among study variables are presented in Table 3. Correlations ranged from small to large (Cohen, 1992) and were consistent with our

hypotheses. For instance, Children's Perceived Participation was positively correlated with observed Emotional Support, and with Observed Children's Choice, and negatively correlated with teacher reports of Decision Making by the Adult. No associations were found between Children's Perceived Participation and their age or gender. Therefore, age and gender were not included in subsequent models for parsimony.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics and associations among variables

Variables	M	SD	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Child level ($N = 336$)										
1. Sex (1 = boys)	.485	–	.06							
2. Chronological age (months)	63.7	8.05	-.02							
3. Children's Perceived Participation	1.77	1.02								
Classroom level ($N = 58$)										
4. Profiles of teachers' ideas	–	–	.11	–						
5. Emotional Support	4.64	0.76	.18*	.14						
6. Classroom Organization	4.98	0.71	.07	.38	.62*					
7. Instructional Support	1.51	0.36	-.08	.21	.04	.28*				
8. Children's Expression and Responsibility	4.14	0.50	.05	.16	.19*	.25*	-.10			
9. Decision Making by the Adult	3.37	0.75	-.18*	.23	-.26*	-.26*	-.11	-.37*		
10. Observed Children's Choice	3.19	1.11	.26*	.11	.55*	.35*	-.22*	.18*	-.37*	
11. Observed Conditions for Participation	2.25	0.79	.08	.14	.35*	.36*	.02	.45*	-.41*	.47*

Note. Eta coefficient was reported for the association between profiles (categorical variable) and other quantitative variables.

Sex – proportion of boys was reported.

* $p < .01$.

3.2. Profiles of teachers' ideas and children's perceived participation: The mediating role of perceived participation practices

To evaluate the suitability of multilevel models, the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was calculated. The results showed that 15.4% of the variance in Children's Perceived Participation was explained at the classroom level and, therefore, a multilevel approach was warranted. Figure 3 shows the results of Model 1, which examined teachers' reports of participation practices as mediators of the association between teacher profiles and Children's Perceived Participation, thus testing H1 and H2. As the mediator models included multiple parallel mediators, multicollinearity was verified. Tolerance values ranged between 0.53 and 0.99; thus, there were no problems with multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2010).

To compare the four categories of the Profiles of Teachers' Ideas, several multiple regressions were conducted, sequentially alternating the reference category. However, we only reported the two significant comparisons (see Figure 3). The profile focusing on Children's Benefits significantly differed from the profiles focusing on Teachers' Motivation and Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility, presenting a lower mean on the mediator Decision Making by the Adult, $M_{dif} = -.326$, $t = -2.839$, $p = .005$; $M_{dif} = -.526$, $t = -4.255$, $p < .001$, respectively. The effect of Decision Making by the Adult on Children's Perceived Participation was negative ($B = -.234$, $t = -2.212$, $p = .032$). A mediating effect of perceived Decision Making by the Adult was found between the comparison of *Children's Benefits* with *Teachers' Motivation* and the outcome Children's Perceived Participation, as the relative indirect effect was significant, $B = .079$, Boot 95% CI = .016, .168. Since the relative direct effect was not significant ($p > .05$), results reveal full mediation. Therefore, teachers' profiles were associated with Children's Perceived Participation through teachers' perceived Decision Making by the Adult, but only for the comparison between the profile focusing on Children's Benefits and the profile focusing on Teachers' Motivation.
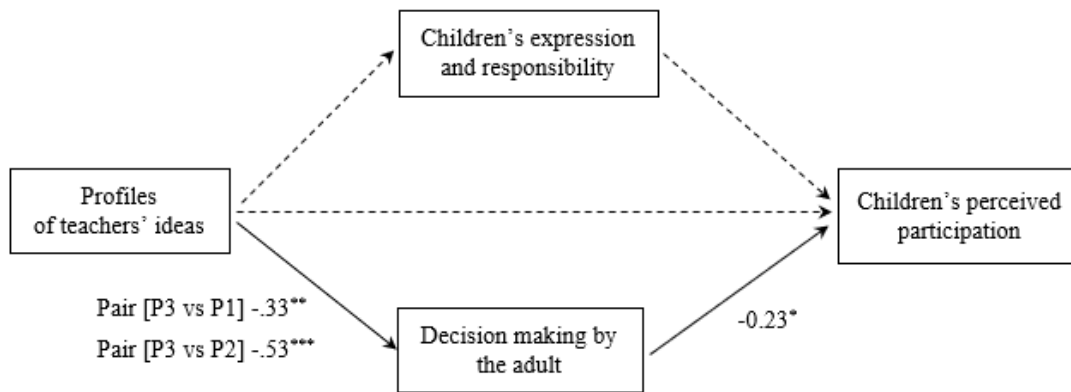
Figure 3. Model examining teachers' perceived participation practices as mediators of the relationship between their ideas about children's right to participate, and Children's Perceived Participation in the ECE setting. P1 = Teachers' Motivation; P2 = Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility; P3 = Children's Benefits. Dashed arrows refer to non-significant effects. Solid arrows refer to significant effects. P1 was the reference category in the pair [P3 vs P1] and P2 was the reference category in the pair [P3 vs P2].

$^{*}p < .05.$ $^{**}p < .01.$ $^{***}p < .001.$

3.3. Teachers' reports of participation practices and children's perceived participation: The mediating role of observed participation practices

Table 4 presents the results of Model 2a which examined the mediating role of observed participation practices in the association between teachers' perceived practices and Children's Perceived Participation (see also Figure 4), thus testing H3 and H4.

Table 4

Hierarchical linear regression of mediation model with observed participation practices

Variables	Observed Children's Choice			Observed Conditions for Participation			Children's Perceived Prticipation		
	Coef.	SE	95% CI	Coef.	SE	95% CI	Coef.	SE	95% CI
Total effect									
Intercept							2.69**	0.82	1.04, 4.33
Children's Expression and Responsibility							-0.02	0.15	-0.33, 0.28
Decision Making by the Adult							-0.24	0.10	-0.44, 0.04
Level-1 variance							0.88***	0.07	0.74, 1.04
Level-2 variance							0.13*	0.06	0.06, 0.31
Direct effect									
Intercept	4.47***	0.66	3.17, 5.78	1.01*	0.43	0.17, 1.85	1.79*	0.81	1.70, 3.41
Children's Expression and Responsibility	0.12	0.12	-0.12, 0.37	0.54***	0.08	0.39, 0.70	0.01	0.15	-0.29, 0.31
Decision Making by the Adult	-0.53***	0.08	-0.69, -0.37	-0.30***	0.05	-0.40, -0.19	-0.16	0.10	-0.36, 0.05
Observed Children's Choice							0.23**	0.07	0.10, 0.37
Observed Conditions for Participation							-0.12	0.10	-0.33, 0.09
Level-1 variance							0.88***	0.07	0.74, 1.04
Level-2 variance							0.09*	0.05	0.03, 0.26
Pseudo R^2	0.14			0.27			0.08		
Indirect effect for Children's Expression and Responsibility									
By Observed Children's Choice							0.03	0.04	-0.04, 0.10
By Observed Conditions for Participation							-0.06	0.05	-0.16, 0.03
Indirect effect for Decision Making by the Adult									
By Observed Children's Choice							-0.12	0.03	-0.20, -0.06
By Observed Conditions for Participation							0.03	0.03	-0.02, 0.09

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Decision Making by the Adult had a significant effect on the mediator Observed Children's Choice ($B = -.529$, $t = -6.460$, $p < .001$). In turn, this mediator had a significant effect on Children's Perceived Participation, $B = .228$, $t = 4.093$, $p < .001$. We found a mediation effect of Observed Children's Choice on the association between Decision Making by the Adult and Children's Perceived Participation, with a significant indirect effect ($B = -.121$, Boot 95% CI = -.195, -.059). The direct effect of Decision Making by the Adult on Children's Perceived Participation was not significant ($p > .05$), therefore there was a full mediation of Observed Children's Choice.
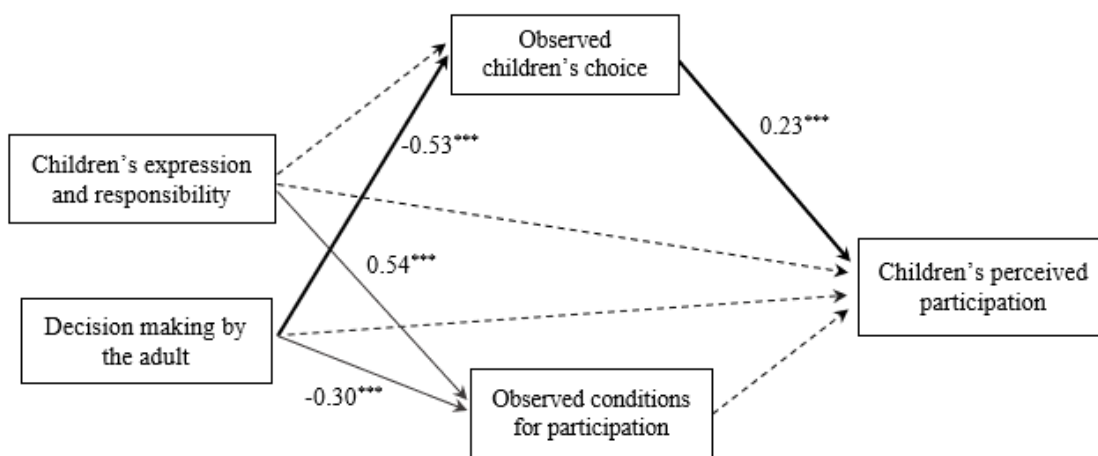

Figure 4. Model examining observed participation practices as parallel multiple mediators of the relationship between teachers' perceptions of their participation practices, and Children's Perceived Participation in the ECE setting. Dashed arrows refer to non-significant effects. Solid arrows refer to significant effects. Solid bold arrows refer to significant mediating effect. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

Table 5 shows the results of Model 2b, which tested the mediating role of process quality between ECE teachers' perceived practices and children's perceived participation (H5). Only one significant mediation was found (see also Figure 5).

Table 5

Hierarchical linear regression of mediation model with domains of observed process quality

Variables	Emotional Support			Classroom Organization			Instructional Support			Children's Perceived Participation		
	Coef.	SE	95% CI	Coef.	SE	95% CI	Coef.	SE	95% CI	Coef.	SE	95% CI
Direct effect												
Intercept	4.73***	0.46	3.83, 5.64	4.62***	0.40	3.83, 5.41	2.27***	0.22	1.83, 2.71	2.58*	1.01	0.56, 4.60
Children's Expression and Responsibility	0.16	0.09	-0.01, 0.33	0.24***	0.07	0.09, 0.38	-0.12**	0.04	-0.20, -0.04	-0.08	0.15	-0.38, 0.23
Decision Making by the Adult	-0.22***	0.06	-0.33, -0.11	-0.18***	0.05	-0.27, -0.08	-0.08**	0.03	-0.13, -0.03	-0.23*	0.10	-0.43, -0.02
Emotional Support										0.25*	0.12	0.01, 0.48
Classroom Organization										-0.10	0.14	-0.37, 0.18
Instructional Support										-0.28	0.21	-0.69, 0.14
Level-1 variance										0.88***	0.07	0.74, 1.04
Level-2 variance										0.11*	0.05	0.04, 0.29
Pseudo R²	0.08			0.10			0.04			0.07		
Indirect effect for Children's Expression and Responsibility												
By Emotional Support										0.04	0.03	-0.02, 0.10
By Classroom Organization										-0.02	0.03	-0.07, 0.04
By Instructional Support										0.03	0.03	-0.04, 0.10
Indirect effect for Decision Making by the Adult												
By Emotional Support										-0.05	0.02	-0.11, -0.02
By Classroom Organization										0.01	0.02	-0.02, 0.06
By Instructional Support										0.02	0.01	-0.00, 0.05

Note. As the model maintained the same predictors variables and the outcome variable, the total effect is the same already reported in Table 4.

* $p < .05.$ ** $p < .01.$ *** $p < .001.$

Specifically, we found a mediating effect of Emotional Support in the association between Decision Making by the Adult and Children's Perceived Participation, with a significant indirect effect (B = -.054, Boot 95% CI = -.106, -.015). The direct, negative effect of Decision Making by the Adult on Children's Perceived Participation remained significant (B = -.227, *t* = -2.247, *p* = .029) when the mediator was present, suggesting a partial mediation.
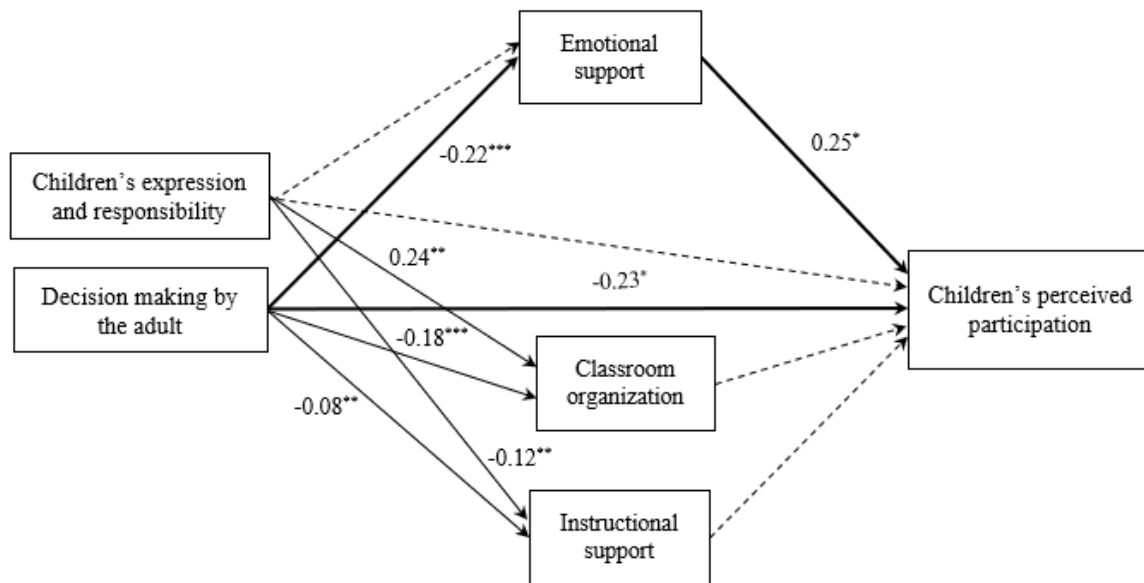

Figure 5. Model examining domains of observed process quality as parallel multiple mediators of the relationship between teachers' perceptions of their participation practices, and children's perceived participation in the ECE setting. Dashed arrows refer to non-significant effects. Solid arrows refer to significant effects. Solid bold arrows refer to significant mediating effect and significant direct effect.
p < .05. **p* < .01. ***p* < .001.

4. Discussion

In this study, we investigated the associations between ECE teachers' ideas about children's right to participate and children's perceived participation in centre-based ECE settings. Specifically, we examined how specific profiles of ECE teachers' ideas predicted children's perceived participation, through teachers' perceived participation practices. Furthermore, we investigated if the association between teachers' perceived participation

practices and children's perceived participation was itself mediated by observed participation practices and observed process quality.

Our hypothesis that ECE teachers' ideas regarding children's right to participate would be directly associated with Children's Perceived Participation (H1), was not confirmed. Nonetheless, ECE teachers' ideas about participation were associated with Children's Perceived Participation, through the mediation of teachers' perceived practices (H2) related to Decision Making by the Adult, thus partially confirming our hypothesis. Specifically, teachers focusing on children's benefits, in comparison with teachers focusing on teachers' motivation, reported lower decision making by the teacher (i.e., restriction of children's participation), which in turn was associated with decreased participation, as reported by children. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that teachers' ideas, namely about children's participation (e.g., Nah & Lee, 2016), are associated with what teachers do (or report doing) (e.g., Gates, 2008; Pajares, 1992). In effect, teachers' ideas seem to be filters and frames for interpreting child participation, but to understand them and what they represent, we need to relate them with practice (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Pajares, 1992). It is also in line with studies showing that children tend to expect fewer opportunities to participate in classrooms characterized by non-participation practices (Correia & Aguiar, 2017). This mediation effect illustrates a bioecological mechanism (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) whereby teacher individual dispositions (i.e., belief systems) are associated with children's subjective experiences of participation, through the quality of proximal processes, that is, the level of reciprocity in classroom interactions, measured through teacher reports of Decision Making by the Adult.

On the differences between teacher profiles, we argue that teachers focusing on children's individual benefits from participation may value it as a means to pursue their mission to enhance children's development, which may strengthen their commitment to increase reciprocity in their relationships with children. In turn, teachers viewing children's participation as dependent on individual teachers' motivation and dispositions may perceive the promotion of children's participation as a discretionary feature of ECE teachers' roles and practices. With potential implications for our understanding of professionalism in ECE, these differences merit further investigation.

Importantly, our findings did not provide support for the mediating role of Children's Expression and Responsibility. With participating teachers reporting relatively high levels of Children's Expression and Responsibility in their classrooms - which reflects the general agreement on the need to challenge the dominance of adult centred-agendas and structures

(Wyness, 2013; Thomas, 2007) - it is possible that variability was not sufficient to result in significant associations and that this factor does not discriminate well teachers with medium to high-levels of support for participation. Therefore, with more variability, the factor reflecting constraints and restrictions to participation was more salient for identifying differences in perceived practices as a function of teachers' profiles of ideas.

The hypothesized association between ECE teachers' perceived participation practices, and children's perceived participation (H3), through observed participation practices (H4) and observed process quality (H5) was also partially confirmed. Specifically, decreased Decision Making by the Adult was associated with higher levels of Observed Children's Choice, which in turn were associated with higher levels of Children's Perceived Participation. Indeed, extant literature suggests that teachers with autonomy-supportive teaching styles value children's perspectives, actions, and decision making (Reeve, 2009), thus leading to more participation opportunities perceived by the child (e.g., Correia & Aguiar, 2017; Samuelsson, Sheridan, & Williams, 2006). Therefore, consistent with Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), teachers' subjective reports of Decision Making by the Adult (i.e., a proxy for the levels of reciprocity in classroom processes) were associated with children's subjective experiences of participation, through observed (i.e., objective) features of the microsystem associated with children's agentic status. Note that we confirmed the mediating role of Observed Children's Choice, but not of Observed Conditions for Participation. This suggests that focusing on instances of children's choice and decision making may be more consequential to understanding associations between teachers' practices and children's perceived participation, than focusing on general practices establishing the conditions for participation.

Regarding observed process quality, we confirmed the mediating role of Emotional Support. Specifically, decreased Decision Making by the Adult, as perceived by ECE teachers, was associated with increased Emotional Support, which was associated with increased Perceived Participation by children. This finding is consistent with research focusing on the associations between participation and ECE quality (e.g., Correia & Aguiar, 2017; Houen et al., 2016; Sheridan, 2007; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). Particularly, teachers in high-quality settings seem to promote more opportunities for children's decision making (Sheridan, 2007) and initiative (Houen et al., 2016). It is also consistent with research emphasizing the importance of teachers' sensitive and respectful attitudes (e.g., Bae, 2012; Freitas Luís et al., 2015; Mesquita-Pires, 2012). Emotional Support measures the extent to which teachers promote a positive climate in the ECE classroom, through positive relationships, affect, communication, and respect. Further, this dimension captures teacher sensitivity, involving teachers' awareness

of and responsiveness to children's needs, assurance of children's comfort. Importantly, however, it also captures teachers' consideration for children's perspectives, through flexibility, child-centeredness, and support for child autonomy, leadership, and expression (Pianta et al., 2008). Therefore, this study provided evidence that teachers' subjective reports of Decision Making by the Adult (which reflect the levels of reciprocity in the classroom) were associated with children's subjective experiences of participation, through observed (i.e., objective) high-quality proximal processes involving positive relationships, sensitiveness, and flexibility (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

It is noteworthy that Classroom Organization and Instructional Support (Pianta et al., 2008) did not mediate this association. Because these dimensions capture group and classroom management (e.g., setting behaviour rules and expectations) and the promotion of children's learning (e.g., facilitating concept and language development), respectively, our findings may reflect a closer conceptual alignment between participation practices and experiences and Emotional Support.

Taken together, our findings suggested that ECE teachers' ideas are associated with children's ideas, through practices. Importantly, these findings highlighted both the power of teachers' mental representations or belief systems and the capability of young children to assess and communicate about their participation experiences.

4.1. Limitations

First, we acknowledge the small size of our sample, resulting in limited statistical power. In this context, the fact that a considerable number of hypothesized associations were significant is noteworthy. Secondly, our study was conducted in the metropolitan area of Lisbon, a southern and non-interior region of Portugal, predominantly composed of urban and semi-urban areas. This regional, community-based sampling approach has consequences for the generalization of findings. As such, future studies should be conducted in more diverse geographical areas. Comparative cross-country studies are also warranted. Third, participant ECE teachers were exclusively women, which reflects the limited male representation in the Portuguese ECE workforce. Fourth, children in this study were aged between 44 and 84 months; therefore, future studies could also investigate younger children's ideas. Fifth, the same coders were responsible for conducting CLASS and participation practices' observations, raising issues of potentially shared variance. Sixth, while Emotional Support and Classroom Organization scores were reliable, interrater agreement estimates for Instructional Support scores were less than optimal.

Finally, while we used both teacher reports and independent observations for assessing participation practices, we only collected children's perceptions of their participation experiences and did not specifically observe children's participation opportunities in each classroom.

4.2. Implications and conclusions

Our findings open new paths for future research. First, one possible direction would be to examine the extent to which classroom process quality (i.e., teacher-child interactions) varies as a function of teachers' profiles of ideas. Second, future research could, in alternative, explore the moderating role of teachers' ideas in the associations between teachers' practices and children's participation, investigating interaction effects between ideas and practices. Third, future studies could extend this work by analysing the associations between ECE teachers' ideas and participation practices and children's socio-cognitive outcomes. As widely stated in the literature, participation may be associated with children's self-esteem, self-efficacy, negotiation or conflict resolution (Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Sinclair, 2004); therefore, future research could investigate participation-related benefits at the child level. Fourth, it is worth examining changes over time in teachers' ideas and practices, connecting with and extending previous research (e.g., Brownlee, 2003; Tarman, 2012).

This study also provided useful insights for ECE teachers' professional development. Specifically, increasing teachers' knowledge about participation benefits at the child level may be important to promote participation practices and increase the levels of reciprocity in classroom processes (i.e., redistributing power; Vieira, 2017), by reducing the focus on decision making by the adult. In addition, it may be necessary to address teacher attitudes towards supporting children's participation, by framing participation practices as part of the mission of ECE centres and workforce. Finally, supporting teachers in considering children's interests and perspectives and sharing decision making may help improve the overall quality of the classroom social climate and, ultimately, benefit individual children's subjective experiences in these settings and their opportunities for further development (Garbarino & Ganzel, 2000).

Overall, this study contributed to a deeper understanding of the associations between teachers' and children's ideas regarding the right to participate in ECE settings, informing about the role of teachers' practices, both self-reported and observed, as the mechanisms that link teachers' and children's ideas. Further, by examining the link between teachers' ideas and practices towards the promotion of children's right to participate we advanced this field, while

also providing an important contribution to the literature focusing on the associations between ideas and practices. Moreover, this was the first empirical effort to address associations between teachers' ideas, teachers' practices, and children's perceived participation, thus supporting the importance of considering not only different levels of analysis (i.e., teachers' ideas and practices; classroom and individual child levels), but also different informants (i.e., teachers, children, and independent observers), and methods (i.e., interviews, questionnaires, observation measures). Further, this study added to the literature, by giving voice to children in assessing their experiences. Hence, our findings provided support for framing participation as a complex, multi-layered concept (Herbots & Put, 2015; Vieira, 2017). Ultimately, consistent with Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), our findings illustrated the interdependence of the subjective (i.e., perceived practices and experiences) and objective (i.e., observed practices) properties of ECE classrooms, and how both should inform our understanding of the conditions needed to promote children's participation.

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CHAPTER VI | GENERAL DISCUSSION

1. **Overview of research findings**

In this chapter, we present an overview of our findings, providing an integrative discussion of the main theoretical, practical, and policy implications. In this dissertation, we investigated children's right to participate in early childhood education (ECE) settings. Our main objectives were to provide the scientific community with (1) a systematic review on children's right to participate in ECE, (2) measures to assess ideas and practices related to children's right to participate in this context, and (3) evidence on the associations between ECE teachers' ideas and practices, and children's perceptions of their participation experiences.

We grounded our work in a rights-based approach to children's participation (e.g., Lundy, 2007; Ghirotto & Mazzoni, 2013). Therefore, we defined participation as children's right to be heard and to have their perspectives considered from an early age, thus influencing events and situations concerning to them (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Participation cuts across distinct areas of knowledge (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010) and has been mostly investigated in sociology and education. Nevertheless, the values and principles of respect for children's rights, and the general assumption that participation is closely related with children's development and evolving competences, find echo in various psychology domains (e.g., Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Lansdown, Jimerson, & Shahroozi, 2014).

Specifically, in the first chapter we provided the theoretical background for the ensuing studies. From a developmental perspective, we anchored this work in the notion of children's evolving competences and gradual need for autonomy (e.g., Lansdown, 2005), considering the specificities of the ECE microsystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Melhuish, 2014). From an educational perspective, we emphasized the importance of classroom processes that promote participation, and framed participation as a key indicator of education quality (e.g., Sheridan, 2007). Moreover, we investigated knowledge structures and practices influencing the promotion of children's participation, investigating how children's right to participate in ECE is understood and experienced by ECE teachers and children themselves.

In the second chapter of this dissertation, we presented the first systematic review on children's right to participate in ECE. This review highlighted the limited number of empirical peer-reviewed studies on children's right to participate in ECE, mostly conducted in northern Europe, and from an educational perspective. Further, it confirmed the absence of a unified theory of participation, and the profusion of definitions and meanings attributed to children's right to participate. Another important finding referred to the greater number of studies focusing on ideas rather than on practices. Specifically, existent studies focus mostly on ECE teachers'

ideas, rather than on children's perceptions and experiences of participation. In addition, this review highlighted the lack of studies focusing on the outcomes of children's participation, meaning that the benefits from promoting child participation have been proposed mostly at a conceptual level (e.g., Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin, & Sinclair, 2003; Sinclair, 2004).

In the third chapter, we presented a measure specifically designed to assess children's ideas about their right to participate in ECE. A major contribution of this study was that we listened to children's unique perspectives and subjective experiences about their own right to participate. Moreover, our findings showed that children are sensitive to differences between participation and non-participation practices in ECE classrooms. This study extended previous research (e.g., Sandseter & Seland, 2016; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001), by informing about children's conceptions, expectations, and perceptions about participation in ECE. Regarding children's conceptions, results suggest that children considered they have more opportunities to make choices in classrooms characterized by participation practices. Regarding children's expectations, classrooms characterized by participation practices were consistently described by children as those in which they feel better, have more fun, and that they like the most. This showed that children seem to value more ECE classrooms in which participation takes place, than classrooms where it does not. As for children's perceptions, approximately half of the children perceived their classroom to be more similar to a classroom described with a participation narrative, even though all participating children were selected from higher-quality ECE classrooms. This finding pointed to the need to further investigate associations between children's ideas about participation and specific features of ECE classrooms' quality.

In the fourth chapter, acknowledging teachers' role in promoting child participation (Kanyal, 2014; Lundy, 2007), we investigated their ideas about children's right to participate in ECE, in a more systematic way than past research. We identified four profiles of ECE teachers' ideas and a typology of teachers. Specifically, we found different groups of teachers focused on different dimensions of children's participation, such as Teachers' Motivation, Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility, Children's Benefits, and participation as Context Dependent. Results showed that profiles of teachers' ideas were significantly associated with years of professional experience and with the type of institution teachers belonged to. Generally, in public centres, approximately half of the ECE teachers focused on participation as Context Dependent (i.e., reflecting conditions and constraints to the promotion of children's participation), whereas in private non-profit centres, half of the ECE teachers focused on Teachers Conditioned Responsibility, and in private for-profit centres, nearly half of the ECE teachers focused on participation as depending on Teacher's Motivation. Further, teachers' age

was significantly different across profiles. For instance, ECE teachers in the profiles focusing on Children's Benefits and participation as Context Dependent were generally older than teachers in the profile focusing on Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility. This study provided insights on ECE teachers' positioning about children's right to participate in ECE settings. Moreover, these findings illustrated the importance of considering not only individual, but also contextual variables to fully understand participation, while also providing important insights for practical interventions targeting ECE teachers.

Finally, in the fifth chapter, we presented the first empirical effort to address the associations between teachers' ideas, teachers' practices (self-reported and observed), and children's perceptions about participation in ECE. Reinforcing the importance of relying on different informants and focusing on different levels of analysis to investigate children's right to participate (see also Vieira, 2017), this study also contributed to the literature focusing on the associations between ideas and practices. Specifically, findings from this study suggested that the association between ECE teachers' ideas about participation and children's perceived participation was mediated by teachers' perceived practices. Further, the association between ECE teachers' perceived participation practices and children's perceived participation was mediated by observed participation practices and observed process quality. This study highlighted the detrimental effects of decision making by the adult (i.e., restrictions to child participation) and the importance of high-quality teacher-child interactions for the promotion of children's participation, particularly of interactions characterized by a positive emotional climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for children's perspectives (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). Thus, findings empirically supported previous research suggesting that the promotion of children's right to participate must be regarded as a key indicator of ECE settings' quality (Sheridan, 2007; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001).

Taken together, the studies in this dissertation illustrate the complex, multi-layered phenomenon of children's right to participate in ECE (e.g., Vieira, 2017). Ideas, practices, and interactions were central concepts within our studies. Based on our findings, we acknowledge the importance of examining knowledge structures (Sigel & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 2002) to understand how ECE teachers' conceptions about participation are translated into daily practices in ECE, and how they are associated with children's experiences of participation. In effect, investigating ECE teachers' ideas about participation helps (a) unveil teachers' understanding (i.e., knowledge) about child participation; (b) situate their perspectives, as a group of professionals (i.e., group entity); (c) understand which participation practices are adopted (i.e., orientation); and (d) explain and justify ECE teachers' options in certain

situations, or under certain circumstances (i.e., justifications) (e.g., Jovchelovitch, 2019; Walmsley, 2004).

Further, our findings support the sociocultural construction of participation, by suggesting that the way children perceive their experiences of participation is influenced by teachers' conceptions (i.e., in turn shaped by individual and contextual variables) and their practices towards the promotion of participation. In addition, these findings emphasise the importance of applying a bioecological framework to child participation (Gal, 2017), considering the distinct but interdependent role of objective and subjective properties of ECE settings, and the relevance of promoting high-quality, reciprocal relationships to foster children's right to participate (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Garbarino & Ganzel, 2000).

2. **Limitations**

Despite the innovative nature and relevant contribution of these studies, some limitations need to be acknowledged. First, we only considered the participation of typically developing children. It was not the purpose of this dissertation to focus on the participation of children with disabilities, a group likely to experience additional challenges in participating, although previous research has acknowledged the importance of exploring the topic (e.g., Eriksson & Granlund, 2004). This prevented us from investigating and comparing, for instance, observed and perceived participation experiences of children with and without disabilities in ECE settings.

Second, we investigated the right to participate of children attending ECE settings (i.e., aged three to five years old), but not of younger children (i.e., aged below three). In effect, the participation of children attending infant and toddler child care has received less attention in research (Berthelsen & Brownlee, 2005). Instead a greater focus has been placed on the participation of older children, mostly from primary school onwards (e.g., Lloyd & Emerson, 2017). Thus, this dissertation did not contribute to inform about specific conceptions or practices underlining the participation of very young children (Wall et al., 2019).

Third, we did not consider ECE professionals other than teachers. We did not consider, for instance, coordinators or assistants, which based on our findings suggesting the importance of the ECE context, are likely to influence the promotion of children's right to participate in ECE.

Fourth, we included both perceived and observed features of ECE teachers' participation practices but did not observe children's experiences. Thus, our findings only

informed about children's perceived experiences of participation, preventing us from developing a more comprehensive understanding of children's individual experiences of participation.

Fifth, we investigated children's right to participate specifically in the ECE microsystem, and did not investigate how participation is promoted in other microsystems, or other systems surrounding children (Gal, 2017). In fact, in our studies we did not investigate children's participation within the family context, nor considered parents' perspectives, or controlled for family factors influencing the promotion of child participation in ECE (e.g., Bedell et al., 2011; Kosher, 2018). Likewise, we did not consider community systems, even though research suggests, for example, that children experience participation differently, in education and community settings (e.g., Lloyd & Emerson, 2017).

Sixth, although we investigated children's right to participate in ECE and considered children's perspectives about their own right, we did not use a participatory approach to design our research studies. For example, we did not include children's perspectives when developing the interview to access their ideas about participation, nor included participatory methods in developing our studies (Kanyal, Luff, Cooper, & Webster, 2014).

Finally, as outlined in the empirical studies of this dissertation, this research was limited to a specific area of Portugal, not considering other regions within the country, nor other countries. Therefore, our studies do not inform, for instance, about country or cultural specificities that might contribute to a fuller comprehension of children's right to participate in ECE. This results in limitations to the generalization of our findings, which inform about the littoral, urban, and semi-urban metropolitan area of Lisbon.

3. Implications

3.1. Implications for future research

After conducting this set of studies, one important aspect remains to be investigated: the outcomes from promoting children's right to participate in ECE. Future research should investigate participation outcomes for children. For instance, future studies should address how ECE teachers' ideas and practices towards the promotion of children's participation are associated with children's socio-cognitive development. Consistent with the presumed participation benefits for children (e.g., Kirby et al., 2003; Sinclair, 2004), future research should specifically focus on children's self-concept (e.g., Harter & Pike, 1984; Mata, Monteiro,

& Peixoto, 2008) and social skills, such as assertiveness and self-control (e.g., Gresham & Elliott, 1990, 2007). Additionally, it is worth investigating if the association between teachers' ideas and practices towards participation, and children outcomes, is mediated by children's perceptions of their right to participate.

In addition to individual outcomes, literature suggests that positive relationships with peers are enhanced when children participate effectively (Kirby et al., 2003). Therefore, future research also needs to address outcomes at the interpersonal level, such as children's friendships. For instance, based on sociometric procedures (e.g., Cillessen, 2011; McCandless & Marshall, 1957), upcoming studies may explore if participation experiences are associated with the number of friends or the quality of friendships of preschool-aged children.

Further, it is important to address participation outcomes at other levels, and for other intervenients. According to extant literature, participation practices benefit not only children, but also professionals and organisations (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). Hence, it becomes particularly relevant to investigate how participation benefits ECE teachers and assistants, as well the ECE setting's organisation and functioning (e.g., improved routines, settings driven by democratic values) (Bradwell, 2019; Franklin, 2002; Sinclair, 2004). Gathering evidence on how participation may benefit children, ECE professionals and ECE settings, is crucial to move from a conceptual to a more applied level, informing professionals and supporting their participation practices.

It is also worth investigating the experiences of younger children and children with disabilities, who are more likely to experience barriers to participation. Furthermore, future research might compare children's participation experiences in different types of ECE settings (e.g., infant and toddler centre-based care, home-based child care, ECE, and primary school settings). This would contribute to advance research suggesting, for instance, that in ECE there is a greater focus on children's participation and interactions, whereas in primary school the emphasis is put on academic learning (Hännikäinen & Rasku-Puttonen, 2010).

Further, because we focused on group-level process quality, future studies might investigate associations between children's participation and their individual experiences of quality (e.g., positive engagement with the teacher, teacher communication, task orientation) (Downer et al., 2010; Slot & Bleses, 2018). Moreover, despite the self-report and observation measures designed in the scope of this dissertation, an observation measure capturing individual children's experiences of participation (e.g., reflecting different levels of participation) is lacking. The development of such a measure will thus support future research and contribute to

deepen the understanding of children's opportunities to meaningfully participate in ECE classrooms.

Another avenue for future research is to explore the importance of the family microsystem. Previous research has suggested associations between parents' attitudes and perceptions about children's right to participate and children's actual experiences of participation (Kosher, 2018). Nonetheless, research exploring associations between family variables and child participation is still scarce. Therefore, future studies might, for example, control for parenting styles (e.g., authoritarian, authoritative, or permissive) (e.g., Cruz et al., 2011) when exploring associations between ECE teachers' practices and children's perceived experiences of participation, or participation benefits for children. In addition, consideration for the mesosystem (e.g., interactions established between the ECE and family systems) might be useful to further understand children's experiences of participation, particularly the interaction (i.e., moderation effects) between children's experiences within ECE and family contexts (Alasuutari, 2014).

According to the existing literature, and our bioecological and transactional frameworks (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Sameroff & Fiese, 1990), time is an important dimension to be considered when investigating child participation (Vieira, 2017). For example, it might be worth studying change in children's participation over time, namely as a function of change and continuity in their teachers' ideas and practices. Similarly, ECE teachers' ideas and practices could be investigated over time (e.g., analysing the role of experience and features of the context).

Finally, despite participation can generally refer to taking part in activities or in decision making in a specific context, such as ECE, it can refer either to a process or to an outcome as well (Thomas, 2007; Vis & Thomas, 2009). Thus, future research may address participation as an outcome (e.g., children's meaningful participation, or children's perceived participation), but also as a means to achieve a certain goal (e.g., planning a play area in the city, promoting children's wellbeing) (Herbots & Put, 2015; Kirby et al., 2003; Tonucci & Rissotto, 2001). While the former refers to the constitutional dimension of participation, the latter has to do with its instrumental dimension (Hanson & Vandaele, 2003).

3.2. **Implications for practice**

In this research project, we provided the field with three different participation measures. Specifically, we developed a measure to assess children's ideas about their right to

participate in ECE, and two measures to assess ECE teachers' ideas and practices about children's participation. These measures might be relevant, for instance, for ECE teachers to assess and reflect on their ideas, as well as on their practices and strategies towards the promotion of participation.

Further, our findings suggested that participation is associated with ECE quality, highlighting the relevance of promoting a positive emotional climate. Importantly, some ECE teachers seem to perceive diverse obstacles and constraints in promoting child participation, while others tend to focus on their responsibility in promoting this right. These findings are in line with literature suggesting that the implementation of participation remains a challenge for ECE professionals (Lansdown, 2010; Prout, 2003). In addition, few teachers seemed to focus on individual children's participation benefits.

Therefore, from a practical perspective, even though participation does not constitute a novelty and some progress has been documented in the way ECE professionals understand and promote participation (Thomas, 2005), professional development initiatives are needed to facilitate more significant changes towards the promotion of this right (e.g., Mesquita-Pires, 2012). Specifically, it seems important that ECE professionals: (a) acquire evidence-based knowledge about children's right to participate (e.g., meanings and dimensions of participation; conditions to implement participation; potential benefits for children, professionals, and the ECE setting; barriers to participation and how to overcome them; examples of relevant participation practices); (b) develop positive attitudes towards participatory practices in decision making processes affecting children's everyday spaces, routines, activities, and experiences in ECE; and (c) develop skills in designing, implementing, and monitoring participatory practices.

Furthermore, our findings highlighted the need to align objectives and efforts to promote children's participation, both at the pedagogical (i.e., classroom) and organizational (i.e., centre) levels of the ECE setting. Thus, in line with our findings, and given the individual and contextual factors (Samuelsson, Sheridan, & Williams, 2006) influencing the implementation of child participation in ECE, professional development initiatives should target ECE teachers, ECE assistants supporting teachers' work, and coordinators in the position to mobilize organizational resources needed to ensure the implementation of participation.

Such a multilevel and cooperative professional development approach is likely to maximize the identification, use, and sustainability of resources fostering the implementation of children's right to participate in ECE. Moreover, such professional development efforts are consistent with European and international directives on children's rights and children's right

to participate, and aligned with European ECE quality frameworks and recommendations to support high-quality ECE (European Commission, 2014; Moser, Leseman, Melhuish, Broekhuizen, & Slot, 2017).

Examples on how to operationalize such a professional development approach towards children's participation include supervision, consulting, online courses on children's right to participate in ECE, and self-assessment tools supporting ECE professionals in delivering high-quality ECE through participatory practices at the classroom/setting level. To our knowledge, even though some tools on children's rights are already available (e.g., UNICEF, 2014), tools specifically devoted to support children's right to participate in ECE are not available. Therefore, this represents a gap in professional development opportunities available to ECE professionals, not only in Portugal but also at the European level.

Importantly, Lundy's model of participation (Lundy, 2007), comprising the elements of space (i.e., children must be given the opportunity to express their views), voice (i.e., children must be enabled to express their views), audience (i.e., children's views must be listened to), and influence (i.e., children's views must be acted upon, as appropriate), might constitute a good example for guiding professional development approaches on children's participation. In addition, the following forms of participation might facilitate the understanding of participation: information (i.e., basic requirement of participation, whereby children gather or receive information), consultation or listening to the child (i.e., children express or are consulted about their own views or interests), and decision (i.e., children make the final decision, or have the last word about a certain aspect/activity in which they were involved, by taking the initiative and making proposals themselves, or with adults' support) (e.g., Marchant & Kirby, 2004; Shier, 2001; Sinclair, 2004; Treseder, 1997).

Still from a practical perspective, the Portuguese Board of Psychologists has recently recommended that all children must be active participants in their communities, and agents of change, proposing an investment in actions to increase children's participation in the expression of their desires, feelings, thoughts, and decisions pertaining to them (Ordem dos Psicólogos, 2017). School psychologists play an important role in the realisation of children's rights at different levels of the educational system (Lansdown, Jimerson, & Shahroozi, 2014), including ECE. The role of school psychologists is particularly important, as it is less focused on achieving particular educational outcomes, and more oriented to enabling contexts, structures, or networks fostering children's participation (Kloos et al., 1997). Moreover, they are in position to inform and influence more broadly the ECE system (e.g., ECE teachers and coordinators), and other systems (e.g., family, policy makers) with which they articulate, and

have the responsibility to identify, develop, and allocate resources that might foster children's right to participate (Kloos et al., 1997). Hence, school psychologists would also benefit from specific training aimed at raising awareness of young children's right to participate, the required conditions and practices to promote it, and the need to overcome protectionist paradigms and adult-centred visions of working with children (e.g., Soares & Tomás, 2004).

School psychologists can be involved in designing and implementing practices and projects fostering children's participation (Dias & Menezes, 2013). Also, they can help promote the values of cooperation and respect as well as the recognition of power imbalances within the ECE system, conveying the importance of establishing positive interactions, creating opportunities for power redistribution and for children's participation in ECE (Dias & Menezes, 2013; Fraser, 2005; Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Peirson, 2001). This would contribute to move from a remediation approach (e.g., face to face), to an ecological preventive and proactive approach (e.g., considering contextual resources), where school psychologists can foster the promotion of children's sense of belonging and wellbeing, by working in close collaboration with other ECE professionals (Ben-Arieh & Attar-Schwartz, 2013).

3.3. Implications for policy making

Along with practitioners and researchers, policy makers have increasingly become aware of the significance of implementing child participation in the early years. A policy memo has recently been released (European Commission, 2019), discussing ways in which policies and wider initiatives adopted by member states of the European Union can facilitate children's participation in decision making (e.g., children's parliaments and consultation processes). This memo followed the European Commission's Recommendation on Investing in Children (European Commission, 2013) and Children's Declaration on Child Participation in Decision Making at National and EU levels (Romanian Children's Board, 2019), both encouraging member states to adopt mechanisms promoting children's participation. Nonetheless, some challenges and incongruences between policies and the promotion of children's participation remain (Theobald, 2019).

To push participation rights forward, policy making should invest in monitoring the progress on the implementation of children's right to participate in ECE and other education levels and life contexts. For this purpose, specific indicators should be developed, based for instance on General Comment 7 (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005), which provides the normative framework to monitor the implementation of the CRC (United

Nations General Assembly, 1989) in ECE (Theobald, 2019; Vaghri, 2011). Further, such indicators should also be aligned with European quality frameworks for ECE (e.g., Moser, Leseman, Melhuish, Broekhuizen, & Slot, 2017).

Importantly, the development of monitoring indicators must reflect policy commitments to (a) ensure the promotion of children's right to participate in ECE; (b) guarantee that participation is considered a criterion when assessing ECE settings' quality; (c) research on the underlying conditions and practices fostering participation; (d) advance or support professional development programs promoting awareness-raising on children's right to participate; (e) develop legal documentation (i.e., legally-binding documents) and/or government guidelines and resources on children's right to participate in ECE, made available to ECE professionals, services, and families. These actions would contribute to recognise, communicate, and recommend pathways towards the enactment of children's participation in ECE.

In Portugal, a national strategy (i.e., legislative diploma) for monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child for 2019-2022 is under discussion (República Portuguesa, 2019). This initiative represents an important commitment, at the policy level, towards the promotion of children's rights. One of the priorities foreseen is to promote access to free and informed participation of children and young people in decisions relevant to them. It is important to ensure that this strategy (a) specifically addresses children's right to participate in all settings and microsystems, including ECE; (b) refers to children's right to participate as the right to be heard, but also as the right to have their opinions, views, and interests respected and considered; (c) frames participation as a key criterion for assessing the quality of education settings in general, and of ECE settings in particular; and (d) considers the need to provide professional training to professionals.

Further, it is important to ensure that this national strategy is grounded in research and addresses teacher's initial training and school curricula (Theobald, 2019). For instance, curricula with a focus on human rights require listening to children, involving them, and considering their perspectives (Brantefors & Quennerstedt, 2016). Therefore, congruence between policy and education might result in ECE curricula and pedagogies more focused on a rights-based approach, and particularly on children's right to participate. Importantly, the Portuguese Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education (Lopes da Silva, Marques, Mata, & Rosa, 2016), explicitly stated the need to listen to children, considering their perspectives and promoting their participation in planning and decision making.

3.4. **Implications for theory**

In this dissertation, we acknowledged the inexistence of a solid theoretical background for children's participation. In fact, the topic has been studied from different perspectives and, therefore, various definitions and models have been proposed. As such, the study of children's participation entails a vast range of perspectives regarding what is participation and how it should be promoted. Nonetheless, given the complexity of children's participation in ECE, summarising it with a single definition or framework, or proposing a unified theory, may be reductionist (Herbots & Put, 2015).

In this set of studies, we framed children's participation as a right associated with ECE settings' quality. Hart's model (1992) was described as a major contribution to understand children's participation, even though we acknowledged the existence of other models and typologies of participation (e.g., Herbots & Put, 2015). Although it was not the focus of our research project to investigate different levels of children's participation in ECE, we considered the existence of different forms and levels of participation when developing, for instance, the measures used in our studies.

Participation is commonly described as children's right to be heard and to have their opinions considered. However, our findings highlight the importance of choice (e.g., observed children's choice) and decision making (e.g., decision making by the adult), supporting participation models that incorporate these dimensions (e.g., Hart, 1992; Kirby et al., 2003, Lundy, 2007; Shier, 2001). Hence, giving children the possibility to make choices and participate in decision making, becoming aware of the impact of their decisions, and believing that their involvement will make a difference, adds complexity to the definition of child participation. Thus, we propose that choice and meaningful participation in decision making, more than being listened to and having a voice, can be regarded as higher-level forms of children's participation (Johnson, 2017; Lundy, 2007). Therefore, models conceptualizing children's participation must consider the salience of these dimensions.

Based on our findings, to understand children's right to participate in ECE, it is important to consider participation from both children's and ECE professionals' perspectives, as participation occurs within interactions with the context and with significant adults. Adults, particularly ECE teachers, play a key role in promoting children's participation, as they are responsible for creating the necessary conditions for children to exert influence on ECE setting's routines, contents, and activities (Sheridan, 2007). Importantly, our findings also suggested that the promotion of participation is influenced by ideas and practices. Therefore,

the interdependence of subjective (i.e., perceived participation practices and experiences) and objective (i.e., observed practices) properties within the ECE setting must be acknowledged when framing children's right to participate in ECE (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Thus, even though existing theoretical models already suggest the important role of teachers in promoting children's participation (e.g., Gal, 2017), it is relevant to add subjective dimensions (e.g., ECE teachers' ideas) to existing frameworks.

4. **Conclusions**

The past years have witnessed considerable progress in initiatives carried out under the banner of children's participation, in different spheres of society, including research. Our work contributed to extend previous studies on children's right to participate in ECE, and several strengths are worth noting. First, we provided the field with a systematic mapping of research on children's right to participate in ECE. Second, we developed three measures related to children's right to participate in ECE (i.e., children's interview, teachers' self-reported practices, observed teacher practices). Third, we relied on different informants (i.e., children and ECE teachers), different levels of analysis (i.e., ideas and practices), and used mixed methods (i.e., self-report and observation measures, quantitative and qualitative data) to address the complexity of child participation. Fourth, we provided further systematized evidence about children's perceptions, ECE teachers' ideas and practices, as well as the associations between them.

Overall, three important findings emerge from this dissertation: the need to examine further children's perspectives on participation, the significant role of teachers' ideas and practices for children's experiences of participation, and the association between children's right to participate and ECE settings' quality. Importantly, we provided empirical evidence on a current and relevant topic that has been mostly explored from a conceptual standpoint.

The celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child contributed to a renewed commitment to protect and promote children's rights and shed light on children's right to participate. As a result, several initiatives were developed, mostly at the policy making level. However, despite the increasing shift from a protection to a participation paradigm, and the progress that has been achieved in the past decades, significant changes are still needed, particularly regarding the promotion of children's participation in decisions affecting them in ECE (e.g., Bradwell, 2019). Specifically, it is important to provide information and training on how to effectively promote children's right to participate in ECE.

Likewise, it is relevant to investigate and raise awareness on the potential multilevel benefits from exerting and promoting child participation, for children, adults, and the society in general.

Children's most important right is the right to have rights (Oman, 2010). Nonetheless, to exercise their rights, children's empowerment and participation are crucial. It also requires adults - from parents and teachers, to academics, researchers, and policy makers - to recognize children as participants in their own lives. Therefore, strong scientific basis for the recognition of children as social agents and competent actors, together with adults' awareness and willingness to share power with children, allowing their participation in decision making processes, are crucial to the sustainability of children's rights (Mathews, 2003). Unlocking children's potential and promoting their right to participate is important to enhance children's quality of life, wellbeing, and sense of inclusiveness, contributing to build more democratic, fairer, participatory, and participated societies.

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APPENDIX[5]

Implementação do direito de participação das crianças em contexto de jardim de infância: As perceções dos educadores

Resumo

Com este estudo pretendeu-se desenvolver e avaliar as características psicométricas de uma medida de avaliação das perceções dos educadores de infância acerca da implementação do direito de participação das crianças em contexto de jardim de infância. Participaram 168 educadores de infância, sendo que, destes, 40 foram observados, em contexto de sala, com o Classroom Observation Scoring System (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). Identificámos dois componentes das perceções dos educadores acerca da participação das crianças: Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças e Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto. A Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto estava negativamente associada à qualidade das salas e às habilitações académicas dos educadores. Paralelamente, educadores do setor público obtiveram resultados mais elevados no componente Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças do que educadores do setor privado com fins lucrativos. Os dados obtidos fornecem evidências que suportam, moderadamente, a fidelidade e a validade da medida.

Palavras-chave: direito de participação das crianças, questionário, perceções, jardim de infância

Implementation of children's participation right in early childhood education: Teacher Perceptions

Abstract

The aim of this study was to develop and evaluate the psychometric properties of a measure designed to assess early childhood education (ECE) teachers' perceptions about the degree of implementation of children's participation right in ECE. Participated in this study 168 preschool teachers, 40 of which were simultaneously observed, in their classrooms, with the Classroom Observation Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). We identified two components of teachers' perceptions of children's participation: Children's Expression and Responsibility and Decision Making by the Adult. Decision Making by the Adult was negatively associated with the domains of classroom quality measured through CLASS and with teachers' education level. Teachers from public centers scored higher in Children's Expression and Responsibility than teachers from private for-profit centers. Findings provide moderate evidence on the reliability and validity of the Assessment Questionnaire of Early Childhood Education Teachers' Perceptions about Children's Participation Right.

Key-words: children's participation right, questionnaire, teacher perceptions, early childhood education

Implémentation du droit de participation des enfants en contexte de jardin d'enfance: Perceptions des éducateurs

Résumé

Cette étude vise à développer et à évaluer les caractéristiques psychométriques d'une mesure des perceptions des éducateurs concernant l'implémentation du droit de participation des enfants en contexte de jardin d'enfance. Des 168 éducateurs participants, 40 ont été observés en contexte de salle à l'aide du Classroom Observation Scoring System (Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). Deux composantes sous-tendant les perceptions des éducateurs ont été identifiées : l'expression et la responsabilité des enfants, et la prise de décision par l'adulte. La prise de décision par l'adulte est négativement corrélée avec la qualité des salles et la formation scolaire des éducateurs. Les éducateurs du service public ont des scores plus élevés sur l'échelle d'expression et de responsabilité des enfants que les éducateurs du service privé. Les résultats montrent que le Questionnaire d'Évaluation des Perceptions des Éducateurs du Droit de Participation des Enfants a des indices modérés de fiabilité et de validité.

Mots-clés: droit de participation des enfants, questionnaire, perceptions, jardin d'enfance

Introdução

A participação das crianças constitui um direito que se traduz na oportunidade de cada criança ser ouvida e de ter as suas opiniões tidas em consideração (Horwath, Hodgkiss, Kalyva, & Spyrou, 2011). Expresso nos artigos 12.º e 13.º da Convenção dos Direitos da Criança (CDC) (1989), este direito atribui aos adultos responsabilidades pela criação de condições para a sua implementação (Lansdown, 2001). No entanto, o pleno exercício do direito de participação das crianças não é, ainda, uma realidade nos vários domínios da sociedade (Horwath et al., 2011).

Os contextos de educação de infância constituem cenários de desenvolvimento onde as crianças devem poder efetivar o direito de participação e influenciar tudo o que lhes diga respeito (Sheridon & Samuelson, 2001). Contudo, existem, ainda, poucas evidências empíricas sobre a forma como a participação das crianças é percecionada e implementada nestes contextos. O objetivo deste estudo é, precisamente, contribuir para colmatar tal lacuna, avaliando as características psicométricas de uma medida especificamente desenhada pelas autoras para avaliar a perceção dos educadores de infância acerca do grau de implementação do direito de participação das crianças em contexto de jardim de infância.

Na breve resenha de literatura que se segue propomo-nos identificar (a) perspetivas teóricas sobre a participação, saliente a multidimensionalidade deste constructo; (b) benefícios da participação para o desenvolvimento da criança; e (c) paradigmas de aprendizagem e modelos pedagógicos que preconizam uma pedagogia da participação. Discutiremos, ainda, a participação enquanto indicador de qualidade de contextos de educação de infância.

O direito de participação e a educação da infância

Ao longo dos últimos anos, tem-se assistido, no campo sociológico e sobretudo da sociologia da infância, a uma reconceptualização da infância, defendendo-se a necessidade de considerar as crianças como atores sociais plenos, com direitos, dotados de competências, voz e ação próprias, integrados nos processos em que participam, e não apenas dependentes dos adultos. Esta nova forma de entendimento contribuiu para o reconhecimento da capacidade das crianças para influenciarem ativamente a sua vida, permitindo proclamar uma cidadania da infância e influenciando o surgimento de novas formas de desenvolver investigação (Prout & James, 1997; Sarmento, Soares, & Tomás, 2006; Soares, 2006).

Após a adoção da CDC (1989), Hart (1992) foi dos primeiros a teorizar sobre a participação enquanto direito, influenciando, de forma decisiva, não só o surgimento de abordagens e perspetivas subsequentes, como também o estabelecimento de programas e políticas internacionais. Tendo definido participação como o processo de partilha de decisões que afetam a vida das crianças e da comunidade onde estão inseridas, o autor estabeleceu oito níveis de participação - Manipulação, Decoração, Tokenismo (simbolismo), Atribuída mas informada, Criança consultada e informada, Decisões iniciadas pelo adulto e partilhadas com as crianças, Decisões iniciadas e dirigidas pelas crianças e Decisões iniciadas pelas crianças e partilhadas com os adultos - sendo que nos três primeiros não existe participação efetiva.

A proposta de Hart gerou críticas, nomeadamente por descrever, essencialmente, o papel dos adultos (Reddy & Ratna, 2002) e por se tratar de um modelo hierárquico, em que cada nível é qualitativamente superior ao anterior (Horwath et al., 2011). Consequentemente, outros investigadores (e.g., Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin, & Sinclair, 2003; Shier, 2001; Treseder, 1997; cit in Horwath et al., 2011) desenvolveram modelos alternativos. Por exemplo, Kirby e colaboradores propõem um modelo composto por quatro níveis: (1) As crianças e pontos de vista dos jovens são tidos em consideração; (2) As crianças e jovens são envolvidos na tomada de decisões; (3) As crianças partilham o poder e a responsabilidade pela tomada de decisão; e (4) As crianças tomam decisões autónomas. Neste modelo, nenhum nível é melhor do que outro. O contexto, as atividades, as decisões e os participantes é que determinam o nível adequado de participação. No domínio da sociologia da infância, Tomás (2007) sugere que o direito de participação pode ainda ser conceptualizado atendendo às suas diferentes dimensões: arenas de participação (i.e., os contextos públicos e privados enquanto espaços em que pode ser exercido, de diferentes formas), âmbitos de participação (i.e., a forma plena, circunstancial ou contínua, de carácter mais organizado ou mais espontâneo, permanente ou efémero, com que pode ser exercido), sentidos de participação (e.g., a medida em que se incita à promoção de atividades de defesa e divulgação dos direitos das crianças) e condições de participação (i.e., reconhecimento do direito de participar, capacidades para exercê-lo e meios para o efetivar).

Sendo o âmbito do conceito de participação tão vasto e transversal, não surpreende que o seu exercício possa ter impacto nos diversos sistemas da sociedade. Efetivamente, o exercício deste direito pode trazer benefícios para as crianças/jovens, para as organizações, para os decisores políticos e para a sociedade (Horwath et al., 2011). De um modo geral, os autores que se debruçam sobre este domínio têm identificado a autoestima (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit [GTZ], 2010; Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010) e a motivação (Kirby & Bryson, 2002) como potenciais benefícios da participação.

Adicionalmente, a investigação sugere que as crianças que se sentem envolvidas e valorizadas, através da participação, têm menos tendência para se envolverem em comportamentos de risco (GTZ, 2010).

Note-se que, em termos conceptuais, o direito de participação revela-se compatível com as teorias construtivistas do desenvolvimento e da aprendizagem, segundo as quais as crianças são coconstrutoras do seu conhecimento. Em simultâneo, através do exercício do direito de participação, a criança poderá ver satisfeita a necessidade psicológica básica de autonomia (Deci & Ryan, 2000) e, deste modo, envolver-se mais nos processos de aprendizagem.

Apesar destes potenciais benefícios, estamos, ainda, muito longe de conseguir assegurar o pleno exercício do direito de participação das crianças (Horwath et al., 2011). Existem vários motivos que contribuem para que isso aconteça, nomeadamente a confusão entre os adultos relativamente ao conceito de participação; as barreiras culturais quanto à participação das crianças; a resistência dos adultos à participação das crianças; a falta de vontade de partilhar o poder com as crianças; o predomínio de visões sociais que impedem os adultos de ver as crianças e os jovens como atores sociais e políticos; e a falta de capacidade dos adultos para promover a participação das crianças (Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation, 2008).

Uma vez que a lei consagra o direito de participação das crianças, é necessário perceber como é que este direito é percecionado e implementado em diferentes contextos. Em Portugal, o direito de participação das crianças está, de modo implícito, contemplado nas Orientações Curriculares para a Educação Pré-escolar (Ministério da Educação, 1997) e na Lei Quadro da Educação Pré-Escolar (Lei n.º 4/97), através da formulação de objetivos relacionados com o desenvolvimento pessoal e social da criança, com vista à educação para uma cidadania democrática. Contudo, existem, ainda, poucas evidências empíricas sobre a forma como o direito de participação das crianças é implementado em contextos de educação de infância, embora várias investigações tenham procurado demonstrar que a qualidade da educação passa pela adoção de uma pedagogia diferenciada, construtivista, e por espaços e práticas participativas protagonizadas com e pelas crianças (e.g., Almeida, 2013; Folque, 2012; Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007).

A Pedagogia da Infância, alinhada com os novos paradigmas da infância, constituiu, desde cedo, um espaço privilegiado para a inauguração de novas formas de pensar e perceber a criança. Assumindo a negociação como instrumento fundamental de participação, Oliveira-Formosinho (2007) identifica duas perspetivas interdependentes da participação em contextos educativos: uma individualista, relacionada com a influência de cada criança no processo de

tomada de decisão, e uma comunitária, relacionada com o sentimento de pertença a uma comunidade.

Embora existam diversas lentes para perspetivar as formas e os fins da participação, diferentes modelos pedagógicos para a educação de infância valorizam a pedagogia da participação como meio privilegiado para promover o desenvolvimento e aumentar a confiança das crianças (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007; Oliveira-Formosinho, Kishimoto, & Pinazza, 2007), como, por exemplo, o modelo HighScope, o modelo Reggio Emilia, ou o Movimento Escola Moderna. Embora com diferentes especificidades, estes modelos assentam numa visão da criança enquanto sujeito ativo: o modelo HighScope defende o papel ativo da criança na sua aprendizagem, enfatizando a sua capacidade para aprender através da realização de atividades por si planeadas e da reflexão sobre as suas ações; o modelo Reggio Emilia defende a igualdade de oportunidades e a partilha de responsabilidades no processo educativo, por toda a comunidade, destacando o atelier como o local para a realização de diversas atividades, através de variadas formas de expressão; o Movimento Escola Moderna, é orientado por valores de participação direta, através de estruturas de cooperação educativa (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007).

Considerando que o jardim de infância constitui um contexto onde as crianças devem exercer o direito de participação e influenciar tudo o que lhes diga respeito (Sheridan & Samuelson, 2001), afigura-se lógico conceptualizar a participação como um indicador da qualidade pedagógica. Consistente com esta conceptualização, existem já evidências de que crianças que frequentam contextos de elevada qualidade relatam mais oportunidades para participar/exercer influência (Sheridan, 2007; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001).

Embora a qualidade pedagógica possa ser perspetivada de variadas formas (Bairrão, 1998; Tobin, 2005), parece ser consensual que as interações educador-criança constituem os mecanismos primordiais de promoção do desenvolvimento e da aprendizagem das crianças. A perspetiva subjacente à operacionalização de qualidade considerada no âmbito deste trabalho, propõe três domínios da interação educador-criança, suportados pela teoria e por evidências empíricas: apoio emocional (e.g., relações positivas, sensibilidade, consideração pelas perspetivas das crianças), organização da sala (e.g., gestão positiva de comportamentos) e apoio ao nível da instrução (e.g., desenvolvimento de conceitos e promoção da linguagem) (ver Hamre, 2014).

Neste estudo, pretende-se desenvolver e avaliar as características psicométricas de uma medida de avaliação da perceção dos educadores de infância acerca do grau de implementação do direito de participação em contexto de jardim de infância. Paralelamente, pretende-se investigar a relação entre a qualidade observada em contexto de jardim de infância e a promoção

da participação. Espera-se que o grau de implementação do direito de participação das crianças em contexto de jardim de infância, conforme relatado pelos educadores de infância, esteja positivamente associado à qualidade das interações educador-crianças.

Método

Participantes

Participaram neste estudo 168 educadores de infância portugueses, na sua maioria do sexo feminino (98%). As idades destes profissionais variaram entre 23 e 63 anos ($M = 45.03$, $DP = 9.29$) e o número de anos de experiência profissional na área da educação de infância variou entre 1 e 36 ($M = 20.71$, $DP = 9.26$). De acordo com os critérios de seleção definidos, foram recrutados educadores de infância responsáveis por salas destinadas a crianças dos 3 aos 5/6 anos de idade, em estabelecimentos da rede nacional de educação pré-escolar (incluindo jardins de infância públicos, privados com fins lucrativos e privados sem fins lucrativos).

O número total de crianças do grupo de cada um destes profissionais variou entre 6 e 27 ($M = 20$, $DP = 4.15$). A tipologia do grupo de crianças sob a responsabilidade do educador dividiu-se em quatro categorias: grupos mistos ($n = 134$), grupos de crianças de 3 anos ($n = 15$), grupos de crianças de 4 anos ($n = 11$) e grupos de crianças de 5 anos ($n = 8$).

A maioria dos educadores exerce funções em entidades públicas ($n = 120$). O setor privado representa cerca de 28.6% das entidades empregadoras destes profissionais.

Instrumentos

Os dados utilizados no âmbito deste estudo foram recolhidos com base em dois instrumentos: (1) um instrumento de autorrelato destinado a captar as perceções dos educadores de infância sobre o grau de implementação do direito de participação das crianças nas suas salas e (2) um instrumento de observação destinado a captar a qualidade das interações educador-crianças.

Questionário de Avaliação das Perceções dos Educadores de Infância sobre o Direito de Participação das Crianças. O questionário desenvolvido no âmbito deste estudo tem como objetivo avaliar as perceções dos educadores de infância acerca da implementação do direito de participação das crianças, em contexto de jardim de infância. A construção do questionário baseou-se na revisão da literatura sobre o conceito de participação e práticas de

participação (e.g., Hart, 1992) e na análise de conteúdo de documentos nacionais e internacionais relevantes nos domínios da educação de infância, para a identificação de indicadores de participação, incluindo as Orientações Curriculares para a Educação Pré-Escolar (Ministério da Educação, 1997), as orientações da National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009), os princípios do Movimento Escola Moderna (Folque, 2012; Niza, 2007) e o Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008). O recurso aos princípios do Movimento da Escola Moderna (Niza, 2007) para a identificação de indicadores de participação está relacionado com o facto de se tratar de um modelo especificamente desenvolvido e utilizado em jardins de infância portugueses, que se pauta por valores que favorecem a participação das crianças. O CLASS foi analisado na medida em que constitui uma medida internacionalmente reconhecida da qualidade das interações em contextos educativos (ver Hamre, 2014) e inclui uma dimensão que capta especificamente a consideração dos adultos pelas perspetivas das crianças, contemplando indicadores de promoção da responsabilidade e da autonomia bem como o grau com que os adultos se focam nos interesses e pontos de vista das crianças.

A análise destes documentos permitiu a identificação de 105 unidades de registo consideradas relevantes. Através da análise das unidades de registo, procedeu-se à operacionalização de 38 itens, que contemplavam experiências de participação consideradas relevantes em contexto de jardim de infância como, por exemplo, a possibilidade de a criança poder escolher os materiais a utilizar nas atividades. Os itens foram elaborados de forma a refletir uma formulação positiva, como é possível verificar no seguinte item: "… *incluo os interesses e as ideias das crianças nos meus objetivos de trabalho e na minha planificação*."

A primeira versão do questionário foi submetida ao escrutínio de peritos nas áreas da psicologia e da sociologia da infância, com investigação nos domínios da qualidade e/ou da participação em contextos de educação de infância bem como especialistas na construção e validação de instrumentos. Deste modo, cinco peritos procederam à avaliação dos itens quanto à sua relevância, clareza e acessibilidade linguística. Os itens foram medidos numa escala de 4 pontos (1 = *Nada relevante*; 2 = *Pouco relevante*; 3 = *Algo Relevante*; 4 = *Muito relevante*). A mesma escala foi utilizada para a clareza e acessibilidade linguística, substituindo a palavra relevante por claro e acessível. A média das pontuações atribuídas pelos peritos foi elevada nos três aspetos em consideração (Relevância: $M = 3.8$, $DP = 0.3$; Clareza: $M = 3.6$, $DP = 0.3$; Acessibilidade: $M = 3.4$, $DP = 0.2$). Após a análise das respostas de cada perito e, considerando os seus comentários e sugestões, eliminaram-se 6 itens e efetuaram-se pequenas alterações em

19, de forma a melhorar a clareza. No final do processo de revisão, os itens foram reordenados com base numa listagem de números aleatórios.

Posteriormente, foi conduzido um pré-teste, com base na administração do questionário a 7 educadores de infância, para aferir se os itens estavam construídos com clareza e para identificar eventuais problemas de formulação. Os respondentes eram todos do sexo feminino e as suas idades variavam entre os 30 e os 49 anos. O questionário não suscitou dúvidas e o tempo de preenchimento variou entre os 10 e os 15 minutos. Considerando a ausência de dúvidas perante os itens apresentados, não foi necessário efetuar novas modificações. A única alteração introduzida no questionário foi a inclusão de informação relativa ao tempo necessário para responder ao mesmo. Pelo facto de não ter sido necessária a alteração de quaisquer itens, estes 7 questionários foram incluídos no estudo, fazendo parte da amostra. Os educadores que responderam, na fase do teste piloto, cumpriam os critérios de inclusão para participação no estudo.

A versão final do questionário compreendeu duas secções, sendo a primeira constituída por questões sociodemográficas, incluindo questões sobre os modelos pedagógicos utilizados pelos educadores de infância. A segunda parte era composta por 30 itens destinados a avaliar as perceções dos educadores de infância sobre a implementação do direito de participação das crianças. Os itens foram avaliados numa escala de 5 pontos (1 = *Nada típico*, 2 = *Pouco típico*, 3 = *Moderadamente típico*, 4 = *Muito típico*, 5 = *Extremamente típico*).

Classroom Assessment Scoring System – Pre-K. O CLASS (Pianta et al., 2008) constitui uma medida de observação que avalia a qualidade das interações entre educadores e crianças, tendo sido utilizada, no âmbito deste estudo, para obtenção de dados para estabelecer a validade convergente do instrumento em análise. Esta opção decorreu do facto de o CLASS, ao contrário de outras medidas de avaliação da qualidade, se focalizar exclusivamente na qualidade das interações educador-crianças e de contemplar indicadores consistentes com a promoção do exercício do direito de participação das crianças, incluindo o apoio à expressão das ideias e perspetivas das crianças e a promoção da sua autonomia e iniciativa. O CLASS é composto por 10 dimensões, reunidas em 3 domínios: Apoio Emocional, que se refere ao estabelecimento de relações positivas; Organização da Sala, relativa à gestão de comportamentos e atividades que promovem o envolvimento das crianças; e Apoio a Nível da Instrução, que alude às interações que favorecem o desenvolvimento linguístico e cognitivo. A cotação de cada dimensão varia entre 1 (indicador de uma qualidade pobre) e 7 (indicador de uma qualidade elevada).

Neste estudo, o acordo interobservadores, verificado em 30% das salas observadas ($n =$ 12), foi calculado com base no coeficiente de correlação intraclasses (*one-way random effects model*), tendo variado entre .56 para o Apoio a Nível da Instrução e . 66 para o Apoio Emocional. A consistência interna dos referidos domínios variou entre $\alpha = .82$, na Organização da Sala, e $\alpha = .91$ na nota global do CLASS.

Procedimento

O processo de recolha de dados teve como principal veículo a utilização da plataforma *online* Qualtrics. O questionário foi divulgado através de redes sociais e de contactos efetuados, por meio eletrónico, junto de educadores de infância ou outros profissionais que desenvolviam a sua atividade junto de educadores de infância. Segundo Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava e John (2004), a utilização da internet para aplicação de questionários pode garantir o acesso a amostras de maior dimensão do que aquelas que seriam possíveis de alcançar pelo método tradicional. Além disso, é um método menos dispendioso.

O instrumento foi distribuído através da divulgação de um *link* com acesso direto ao questionário, precedido das instruções de preenchimento e esclarecendo o respondente que a sua participação era completamente voluntária e anónima, respeitando as exigências éticas, nomeadamente no que diz respeito ao consentimento informado, garantia de proteção dos dados, participação voluntária e informada e respeito pela dignidade humana, conforme o disposto na American Psychological Association (2010) e no Código Deontológico da Ordem dos Psicólogos Portugueses (2011).

Na sua versão *online*, o questionário foi construído de forma a exigir resposta obrigatória a todos os itens, com a impossibilidade de avançar para a secção seguinte, sem o completo preenchimento dos itens. O processo de divulgação foi mantido até ter sido assegurado um mínimo de 5 participantes por item. Além da divulgação do questionário *online*, 40 educadores de infância responsáveis por salas observadas com base no CLASS, foram convidados a responder ao questionário através do preenchimento em suporte de papel.

A aplicação do CLASS foi efetuada por observadores treinados e certificados, no período da manhã, num dia considerado típico pelo educador. Em cada sala, foram realizados, quatro períodos de observação de, pelo menos, 15 minutos.

Resultados

Os 30 itens relativos às perceções dos educadores de infância acerca da implementação do direito de participação das crianças em contexto de jardim de infância foram submetidos a uma análise de componentes principais. A verificação dos pressupostos foi aferida previamente, através da adequabilidade dos dados (i.e., assegurando um rácio de, pelo menos, 5 educadores de infância por cada item) e de uma matriz de correlações favorável entre os itens, com vários valores superiores a .30. O valor de Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin foi de .82, o que excede o valor recomendado, e o teste de esfericidade de Bartlett apresentou valor estatisticamente significativo ($p < .001$) (Pallant, 2005).

A análise de componentes principais permitiu identificar sete componentes com *eigenvalues* superiores a 1. No entanto, após a análise do *scree plot* e o cálculo de uma análise paralela (Patil, Singh, Mishra, & Donovan, 2007), constatou-se que uma solução de dois componentes era adequada. No decurso da análise de componentes principais e para interpretar melhor os componentes, foi realizada uma rotação oblíqua Oblimin, que convergiu após cerca de 60 iterações. De forma sequencial, foram eliminados 4 itens (...*as crianças escolhem os parceiros de brincadeira; ...as crianças são informadas acerca das atividades planeadas por mim; ...as crianças escolhem os materiais utilizados nas atividades; ...defino o plano de atividades em conjunto com as crianças*) que contribuíam de forma idêntica para ambos os componentes ou que não contribuíam para nenhum componente, até à obtenção da solução final, apresentada no Quadro 1.

O primeiro componente agrega itens que remetem para a liberdade de expressão e para aspetos relacionados com a definição de regras e responsabilidade por tarefas diárias, pelo que se adotou o nome Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças ($\alpha = .85$). Os itens que constituem o segundo componente configuram essencialmente questões relacionadas com a iniciativa da decisão pelo adulto, pelo que este componente foi designado como Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto ($\alpha = .78$). Os dois componentes explicam 35.62% da variância total, sendo que o primeiro componente explica 25.29% e o segundo componente explica 10.33% da variância.

Quadro 1. *Resultados da análise de componentes principais dos itens relativos às perceções dos educadores de infância sobre a implementação do direito de participação das crianças (N = 168)*

Itens	Comunalidades	Matriz de padrão		Matriz de estrutura	
		Componente		Componente	
Na minha sala...		1	2	1	2
...estimulo as crianças a expressar publicamente a sua opinião (e.g., debates).	0.51	**.75**	.18	**.69**	-.06
...proporciono oportunidades diárias para as crianças expressarem as suas ideias e opiniões.	0.52	**.74**	.09	**.72**	-.15
...proporciono oportunidades diárias para as crianças partilharem as suas vivências pessoais nas atividades de grupo.	0.49	**.71**	.03	**.70**	-.20
...as crianças participam na definição das tarefas inerentes ao funcionamento da sala.	0.48	**.64**	-.13	**.68**	-.34
...as crianças fazem propostas de atividades e brincadeiras aos adultos.	0.40	**.61**	-.07	**.63**	-.27
...as regras indispensáveis à vida em comum são elaboradas em conjunto com as crianças.	0.34	**.58**	-.01	**.58**	-.19
...as crianças participam nos momentos de avaliação do trabalho desenvolvido.	0.45	**.58**	-.20	**.64**	-.38
...as situações problemáticas são debatidas em grupo, tentando que as crianças encontrem as suas próprias soluções.	0.34	**.57**	-.03	**.58**	-.22
...modifico os meus planos para desenvolver atividades relacionadas com os interesses momentâneos das crianças.	0.30	**.57**	.11	**.53**	-.07
... incluo os interesses e as ideias das crianças nos meus objetivos de trabalho e na minha planificação.	0.32	**.56**	-.02	**.57**	-.20
...as crianças são responsáveis por tarefas do dia-a-dia, necessárias à vida coletiva (e.g., alimentar um animal de estimação, marcar as presenças, etc.).	0.25	**.51**	.04	**.50**	-.12
...as crianças têm liberdade de movimentos e podem decidir onde brincar/trabalhar.	0.31	**.51**	-.12	**.55**	-.28
...os trabalhos e materiais expostos estão colocados ao nível e ao alcance das crianças.	0.22	**.47**	.00	**.47**	-.15
...as crianças são responsáveis pelo registo das atividades que escolhem.	0.23	**.41**	-.16	**.46**	-.28
...a maior parte dos materiais expostos foi elaborada pelas crianças.	0.21	**.38**	-.16	**.43**	-.28
...sou eu que defino a organização das áreas e materiais em função das características do espaço e dos objetivos que me propus atingir com o grupo.	0.55	.07	**.76**	-.17	**.74**
...sou eu que defino o plano de atividades de forma a assegurar o cumprimento dos objetivos que me propus atingir com o grupo.	0.52	-.05	**.71**	-.28	**.72**
...sou eu que defino as atividades e brincadeiras, de acordo com os materiais e espaço disponíveis.	0.48	-.09	**.66**	-.30	**.69**
...sou eu que defino as regras que as crianças têm que cumprir.	0.41	-.05	**.62**	-.24	**.64**
...todas as crianças fazem os mesmos trabalhos, com os mesmos materiais.	0.39	-.06	**.60**	-.25	**.62**
… são as crianças que escolhem os temas para os projetos a desenvolver. (Invertido)	0.48	-.24	**.58**	-.42	**.66**
...as crianças sabem que há momentos para trabalhar e momentos para conversar.	0.30	.28	**.57**	.10	**.48**
...o horário é determinado por mim ou pela coordenação e as crianças sabem que têm de o cumprir.	0.22	.05	**.48**	-.10	**.46**
...sou eu que escolho os companheiros de brincadeira das crianças de modo a evitar problemas e a atingir determinados objetivos.	0.19	-.05	**.41**	-.18	**.43**
...as crianças participam na tomada de decisões relativas à organização / dinâmica do jardim de infância (e.g., horários; regras; passeios). (Invertido)	0.21	-.20	**.35**	-.310	**.41**
...as crianças decidem onde sentar-se, durante as refeições. (Invertido)	0.14	-.14	**.31**	-.235	**.35**

No caso da subescala Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto, foram identificados 3 itens que contribuíam negativamente para o componente e que, por isso, foram invertidos na solução final. As estatísticas descritivas das componentes ou subescalas relativas às perceções dos educadores sobre a implementação do direito de participação das crianças figuram no Quadro 2. A média das respostas à subescala Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto indica que, de um modo geral, o peso dos adultos na tomada de decisão é moderado. As perceções sobre a Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças apresentaram médias elevadas, indicativas que os educadores participantes consideram que as crianças têm liberdade de expressão e podem ser responsáveis por tarefas diárias.

Quadro 2. *Médias, desvios-padrão e amplitude dos dados das subescalas relativas às perceções dos educadores sobre a implementação do direito de participação das crianças (N = 168)*

	M	*DP*	Mín.	Máx.
Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças	4.38	0.40	3.07	5.00
Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto	2.89	0.56	1.55	4.27

A título exploratório, no sentido de informar acerca da adequação de eventuais análises com base numa escala única de perceções dos educadores, calculou-se o Alfa de Cronbach para a totalidade dos itens. Assim, quando considerados os 30 itens relativos às perceções dos educadores de infância sobre a implementação do direito de participação das crianças, em contexto de jardim de infância, α = .70. Após a inversão de oito itens que apresentavam correlações negativas com o total da escala e de um item formulado em sentido inverso, do ponto de vista conceptual, obteve-se um coeficiente Alfa de Cronbach de .88.

Não foram apuradas diferenças estatisticamente significativas nas perceções dos educadores de infância relativamente à Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto, em função da idade ($t_{(165)} = 0.788$, $p = .432$) e dos anos de experiência em educação de infância ($t_{(165)} = 1.430$, $p = .155$). Do mesmo modo, não se verificaram diferenças estatisticamente significativas entre os educadores que trabalhavam no setor público ou no setor privado com e sem fins lucrativos relativamente às perceções sobre a Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto ($F_{(2;165)} = 1.474$, $p = .232$).

Os resultados de uma *one-way* Anova indicaram que existiam diferenças estatisticamente significativas nas perceções sobre a Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto, em

função do tipo de grupo das crianças ($F_{(3;164)}$ = 4.771, p = .003). Com base no teste de comparações múltiplas Scheffe, foram apuradas diferenças estatisticamente significativas entre os educadores que tinham grupos de crianças de 4 anos e os educadores que tinham sob a sua responsabilidade grupos mistos (p =.029). Os educadores com grupos mistos obtiveram uma média de respostas inferior (M = 2.82), face aos educadores com grupos de crianças de 4 anos (M = 3.34). Estima-se, com um nível de confiança de 95%, que o verdadeiro valor médio das respostas nesta subescala se situa entre 2.73 e 2.91 para os educadores com grupos de crianças mistos. Para o caso dos educadores com grupos de crianças de 4 quatro anos, esses valores situam-se entre 2.88 e 3.81.

No que diz respeito às perceções dos educadores sobre a Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças, foram efetuados testes não paramétricos, devido à violação do pressuposto de normalidade da distribuição. À semelhança dos resultados obtidos para as perceções sobre a Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto, não foram encontradas diferenças estatisticamente significativas em função da idade dos educadores (U = 3111.500, z = - 1.053, p = .292) e da sua experiência em educação de infância (U = 3210.500, z = -0.756, p = .450).

Contudo, os resultados do teste de Kruskal-Wallis revelaram a existência de diferenças estatisticamente significativas nas perceções dos educadores em relação à Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças, em função do tipo de instituição em que trabalhavam ($H_{(2)}$ = 7.108, p = .029). Com base no teste de comparação múltipla Scheffe, apuraram-se diferenças (p = .030) entre o setor público (M = 4.42) e o setor privado com fins lucrativos (M = 4.17). Considerando um nível de confiança de 95%, estima-se que o verdadeiro valor médio das respostas à subescala se situa entre 4.35 e 4.49 para o setor público e entre 3.97 e 4.36 para o setor privado com fins lucrativos, sendo a variabilidade dos dados superior neste último grupo.

No que diz respeito ao tipo de grupo sob a responsabilidade dos educadores, verificou-se a existência de diferenças estatisticamente significativas ($H_{(3)}$ = 8.671, p = .034). Contudo, após o cálculo do teste de comparação múltipla Scheffe, não foram encontradas diferenças entre pares de grupos.

De modo a verificar a direção e magnitude das associações entre os dois componentes obtidos neste estudo e entre estes e determinadas variáveis sociodemográficas, foram calculados coeficientes de correlação de Spearman, uma vez que a maioria das variáveis em análise apresentava distribuição não normal. No Quadro 3, é possível verificar a existência de uma associação positiva, estatisticamente significativa, entre as perceções sobre a Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças e o número total de crianças no grupo do educador bem como uma associação negativa, estatisticamente significativa, entre as perceções de Tomada de

Decisão pelo Adulto e as habilitações académicas do educador de infância. Finalmente, apurou-se uma associação negativa moderada, estatisticamente significativa, entre as perceções de Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto e as perceções relativas à Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças.

Quadro 3. *Coeficientes de correlação de Spearman entre as perceções dos educadores sobre a implementação do direito de participação das crianças e variáveis sociodemográficas (N = 168)*

	1	2	3	4
1. Habilitações académicas do educador	---			
2. Número total de crianças no grupo do educador	-.05	---		
3. Anos de serviço como educador de infância	-.21**	.09	---	
4. Expressão e responsabilidade das crianças	.05	.16*	.02	---
5. Tomada de decisão pelo adulto	-.26**	-.07	-.02	-.40**

$* p < .05. ** p <.01.$

No Quadro 4, são apresentadas as correlações entre as subescalas relativas às perceções dos educadores sobre participação e os resultados relativos à qualidade observada nas salas, avaliada com base no CLASS. Foram considerados apenas os dados dos educadores que responderam ao inquérito e foram, simultaneamente, observados em contexto de sala ($N = 40$). Recorreu-se ao coeficiente de correlação de Spearman, uma vez que a maioria das variáveis apresentava distribuição não normal. Apenas foram apuradas associações estatisticamente significativas, negativas e de intensidade moderada, entre os três domínios e a pontuação total do CLASS e a subescala relativa às perceções de Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto.

Quadro 4. *Coeficientes de correlação de Spearman entre as perceções dos educadores sobre a implementação do direito de participação das crianças e a qualidade observada com o CLASS (N = 40)*

	Apoio Emocional	Organização da Sala	Apoio à Instrução	CLASS (pontuação total)
Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças	.26	.22	.19	.28
Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto	-.47**	-.34*	-.51**	-.49**

$* p < .05. ** p <.01$

Discussão

Com este trabalho, pretendeu-se desenvolver e avaliar as características psicométricas de uma medida de avaliação das perceções dos educadores de infância acerca do grau de implementação do direito de participação das crianças, em contexto de jardim de infância. Deste modo, procedeu-se à verificação da validade de constructo através de uma análise de componentes principais. Esta análise permitiu identificar dois componentes relativos às perceções dos educadores sobre a implementação do direito de participação das crianças, designadamente *Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças* e *Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto*. A emergência destes dois componentes traduz algumas dimensões do conceito de participação. No primeiro componente, *Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças*, encontravam-se presentes itens que sugeriam liberdade de expressão e envolvimento na definição de regras e nas tarefas diárias. A liberdade de expressão é uma das dimensões enunciadas nos artigos 12.º e 13.º da CDC (1989). A possibilidade de a criança participar na definição de regras e nas tarefas no dia-a-dia do jardim de infância, ou seja, a possibilidade de influenciar as decisões sobre as atividades diárias, bem como o envolvimento nas mesmas, está presente nos níveis de participação propostos por Hart (1992), nomeadamente no que diz respeito à partilha de decisões com as crianças e ao estímulo para que as crianças expressem as suas opiniões, assegurando que estas sejam ouvidas. O envolvimento numa atividade, enquanto dimensão de participação, está também presente nos itens que integram este componente (Almqvist, Uys, & Sandberg, 2007; Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010).

O segundo componente, *Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto,* inclui itens que remetem, de algum modo, para limitações à participação da criança, por não contemplarem a criança como parceiro na tomada de decisão ou como decisor. Os itens descrevem situações em que é o adulto que decide os aspetos relativos às atividades diárias em contexto de jardim de infância, incluindo aspetos relacionados com atividades de lazer e com o cumprimento de objetivos pedagógicos. Este componente reflete, essencialmente, o papel do adulto, conforme referem Reddy e Ratna (2002). A criança não é convidada a fazer parte do processo de tomada de decisão; ou seja, os adultos prosseguem os seus objetivos pedagógicos, de acordo com as características do grupo de crianças e regras institucionais e não partilham a tomada de decisão.

A verificação da fidelidade dos dados permitiu verificar que ambos os componentes - *Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças* e *Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto* - revelaram boa consistência interna, podendo ser utilizadas como variáveis em análises subsequentes.

A média de respostas ao componente *Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças* foi elevada, demonstrando que, de acordo com os relatos dos educadores de infância, a liberdade de expressão e a participação das crianças nas atividades diárias eram muito típicas dos contextos de jardim de infância. Por outro lado, as respostas ao componente *Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto* revelaram que, de acordo com o relato dos educadores, o papel preponderante do adulto na tomada de decisão era moderadamente típico. Estes dados parecem ser consistentes com as Orientações Curriculares para a Educação Pré-escolar (Ministério da Educação, 1997), na medida em que parecem refletir a valorização da promoção da participação das crianças. São, também, globalmente consistentes com a investigação prévia. Por exemplo, Samuelsson, Sheridan e Williams (2006) concluíram que, em educação de infância, é comum considerar-se o direito de as crianças serem livres de expressar a sua opinião sobre o que as rodeia. Paralelamente, Sheridan e Samuelsson (2001) reuniram evidências de que as crianças podem decidir sobre que jogos e atividades realizar, apesar de terem pouca influência relativamente a aspetos relacionados com a organização global do contexto educativo.

As perceções dos educadores relativamente à *Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças* e à *Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto* não variaram em função de variáveis sociodemográficas como a idade e a experiência em educação de infância. Em investigações anteriores, foram encontradas diferenças nas práticas dos educadores, em função da sua formação e especialização profissional (Wen, Elicker, & McMullen, 2011).

Neste estudo, verificaram-se diferenças entre os educadores relativamente às perceções sobre a *Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças,* sugerindo que, de acordo com o relato dos educadores, a implementação do direito de participação das crianças ao nível da liberdade de expressão e participação nas atividades diárias é maior no setor público do que no setor privado com fins lucrativos. A ocorrência destas diferenças poderá estar relacionada com a natureza das organizações e com diferenças nas expectativas e pressões das famílias, que poderão influenciar os objetivos e práticas dos educadores (Hyson, Hirsh-Pasek, & Rescorla, 1990; Stipek & Byler,1997).

Paralelamente, verificaram-se diferenças nas perceções dos educadores relativamente à *Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto* em função da composição etária do grupo de crianças, sugerindo que, de acordo com o relato dos educadores, a preponderância do papel do adulto na tomada de decisão é maior em grupos homogéneos de crianças de 4 anos. A diferença das perceções dos educadores em função da composição etária do grupo pode estar relacionada com a forma como encaram o desenvolvimento da criança e com a forma de as incluir no

processo de tomada de decisão. Stipek e Byler (1997) reforçam esta ideia, sugerindo que o quadro referencial teórico sobre o desenvolvimento cognitivo da criança, os objetivos dos educadores e a idade da criança (Tarman, 2012) condicionam as suas perceções/crenças. É possível sugerir, também, como hipótese explicativa, que nos grupos mistos o educador recorra às crianças mais velhas como recurso, partilhando com o grupo a tomada de decisão. Por outro lado, em grupos homogéneos de crianças mais novas o educador poderá sentir necessidade de assumir, em maior grau, a responsabilidade pelas decisões.

No que diz respeito à *Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto*, verificaram-se associações negativas com as habilitações académicas dos educadores, sugerindo que aquela é menos típica em salas de educadores de infância com níveis mais elevados de educação formal. A relação entre níveis académicos mais elevados e práticas pedagógicas promotoras da participação é convergente com os resultados do estudo de Wen et al. (2011), segundo os quais os educadores que foram submetidos a formação específica na área da educação de infância utilizam frequentemente abordagens pedagógicas mais apropriadas ao desenvolvimento da criança e ao seu envolvimento no processo de aprendizagem. É expectável que os educadores com habilitações académicas mais elevadas tenham maior acesso e exposição a práticas educativas promotoras de participação.

A relação entre o número total de crianças do grupo e as perceções dos educadores sobre a *Expressão e Responsabilidade da Criança* é positiva, o que significa que, quanto maior é o número de crianças no grupo, maior é a participação das crianças, de acordo com o relato dos educadores. Estes resultados podem indicar que os educadores, perante grupos maiores de crianças, poderão sentir a necessidade de implicar mais as crianças nas tarefas diárias. Esta abordagem permite uma maior integração da diversidade de experiências individuais das crianças e, assim, facilita o treino de processo democrático, conforme é sugerido nas Orientações Curriculares para a Educação Pré-escolar (Ministério da Educação, 1997).

A relação negativa entre as subescalas de *Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto* e de *Expressão e Responsabilidade das Crianças* era expectável devido ao facto de cada escala medir dimensões opostas do direito de participação. A primeira subescala reflete a desvalorização da participação da criança, que poderá estar implicitamente associada à confusão entre os adultos acerca do conceito de participação, à resistência relativamente à participação da criança e à falta de vontade em partilhar o poder com as crianças (Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation, 2008). A segunda subescala compreende itens promotores da participação da criança como é proposto, por exemplo, nos níveis de participação descritos por Kirby e colaboradores (2003), em que os pontos de vista das crianças

são tidos em consideração e estas são envolvidas no processo de tomada de decisão. Estão também presentes as dimensões de partilha do poder, a necessidade de ouvir as vozes das crianças (Sinclair, 2004) e o envolvimento em atividades (Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010), como brincar e fazer amigos (Almqvist et al., 2007).

Apenas a subescala *Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto* apresentou correlações negativas e de intensidade moderada com os vários domínios do CLASS. Esta associação parece indicar que os educadores que relatam mais práticas baseadas na tomada de decisão pelo adulto, manifestam, em contexto de sala, menos apoio emocional e práticas de menor qualidade ao nível da gestão de comportamentos e da promoção do desenvolvimento cognitivo e da linguagem. Estas correlações poderão constituir indicadores de validade convergente da subescala de *Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto*. Assim, considera-se que a hipótese formulada neste estudo segundo a qual o grau de implementação do direito de participação das crianças em contexto de jardim de infância estaria associado à qualidade das interações educador-criança, foi parcialmente confirmada. Estes resultados parecem convergir com estudos anteriores que referem a relação entre qualidade e participação, sugerindo que a participação das crianças e o seu envolvimento no processo de tomada de decisão são indicadores da qualidade dos contextos educativos (Sheridan, 2007; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). Aliás, a qualidade é definida, por alguns autores (e.g., Balageur, Mestres, & Penn, 1991), como tendo em consideração os direitos da criança, nomeadamente a liberdade de expressão, o que parece revelador da importância da participação. Esta ideia é, também, visível nas propostas de Pianta e Hamre (2009) relativamente à avaliação da qualidade das interações educador/professor-crianças, fundamentadas nas teorias da vinculação e da autodeterminação.

Considerando os aspetos metodológicos relativos à recolha de dados, alguns autores consideram que a utilização da internet para a recolha de dados pode gerar respostas repetidas e não permitir diversidade demográfica (ver Gosling et al., 2004), pelo que este estudo poderia estar, de alguma forma, limitado a este nível. Contudo, Gosling e colaboradores verificaram que os dados recolhidos através da internet são tão consistentes como os dados recolhidos através de métodos tradicionais. Nesse sentido, consideramos que a recolha de dados, através da *internet* foi uma opção oportuna e prática, tendo em conta o tempo e recursos disponíveis.

A amostra utilizada neste trabalho poderá não ser representativa da população de educadores de infância, pelo que a generalização dos resultados obtidos, para a população, exige, necessariamente, cautela. Assim, em investigações futuras, a aplicação do instrumento em estudo a uma amostra superior, bem como o aumento do número de salas observadas com recurso ao CLASS (ou outra medida de observação da qualidade de processo) será vantajosa.

Uma potencial limitação adicional deste trabalho remete para a necessidade de inclusão e operacionalização de outros conceitos/dimensões associados à implementação do direito de participação das crianças em contexto de jardim de infância, incluindo os obstáculos à participação.

No que diz respeito à fidelidade da medida em estudo, não foi possível determinar a sua estabilidade em termos temporais, através da aplicação teste-reteste (Coutinho, 2014). Seria importante realizar um estudo de carácter longitudinal que permitisse aferir o comportamento dos dados em, pelo menos, dois momentos distintos, a fim de obter índices adicionais acerca da fidelidade. Finalmente, os resultados relativos à validade convergente da medida em estudo, poderão não ser suficientemente robustos uma vez que apenas uma das subescalas do Questionário de Avaliação das Perceções dos Educadores de Infância sobre o Direito de Participação das Criança estava associada aos domínios do CLASS. No entanto, é de realçar que a análise da associação entre as duas medidas constitui uma mais-valia, que contribuiu para o rigor científico do trabalho desenvolvido.

Apesar das limitações referidas, o Questionário de Avaliação das Perceções dos Educadores de Infância sobre o Direito de Participação das Criança constitui uma medida fundamentada em pressupostos conceptuais, que reúne características de fidelidade e validade. De um modo geral, foi possível confirmar a consistência interna das duas subescalas. A submissão do questionário ao escrutínio de peritos permitiu validar os itens quanto à sua clareza e relevância e a realização do pré-teste foi, também, uma forma de confirmar a clareza dos itens, junto dos participantes. A análise de componentes principais proporcionou dados relativos à validade de constructo, tendo sido possível captar diferenças entre educadores em função do tipo de instituição em que desempenhavam funções e do tipo de grupo que tinham sob a sua responsabilidade. Estes aspetos, interligados, permitiram fornecer informação quanto às características psicométricas da medida por nós elaborada.

Em suma, este estudo contribuiu para a criação e validação de um novo instrumento que permite avaliar as perceções dos educadores de infância sobre o grau de implementação do direito de participação das crianças em contexto de jardim de infância. Colmatando uma lacuna da investigação neste âmbito, apresenta-se à comunidade científica e profissional um recurso novo, com potencial para contribuir para a investigação acerca da participação das crianças em contexto de jardim de infância.

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