Children's participation as neo-liberal governance?

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Children's participation initiatives have been increasingly introduced within various institutional jurisdictions around the world, partly in response to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Such initiatives have been critically evaluated from a number of different angles. This article engages with an avenue of critique which argues that children's participatory initiatives resonate with a neoliberal economic and political context that prioritizes middle class, western individualism, and ultimately fosters children's deeper subjugation through self-governance. Respecting these as legitimate concerns, this article draws on two counter-positions to argue that while children's participation can certainly be conceptualized and practised in ways that reflect neo-liberal, individualized self-governance, it does not necessarily do so. To make this argument I engage, on the one hand, with Foucault's work on the care of the self, and on the other, with more collective approaches to participation.

Keywords: childhood; participation; governmentality; school; neo-liberalism; individualism

The past several decades have seen increasing advocacy for children's participation in decisions that affect them and a consequent rise in institutionalized participatory practices in a number of jurisdictions around the world. This focus has been evident in student-centred educational practices, family decision-making, civic youth advisory councils, and social services initiatives, for example (e.g. see Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010). Advocacy for children's participation has been bolstered by Article 12 of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the sociology of childhood's emphasis on children as agentic beings and as necessary participants in research (James & Prout, 1990), and children's rising consumerism (Pugh, 2009). While celebrated, such participatory initiatives have also generated concern as critics consider challenges to ensuring such participation, unintended effects such as reproducing privilege, and the broader political and economic context for this formalized interest in children's participation. Most notably for this article, it has been argued that children's participatory initiatives resonate with a neoliberal economic and political context that prioritizes western individualism (Burr, 2004) and middle-class parenting (Vandenbroek & Bourverne-de Bie, 2006), while ultimately fostering children's deeper subjugation through self-governance (Bessant, 2003; Millei, 2010; Masscheliein & Quaghebeur, 2005; Pongratz, 2007).

These critical concerns are legitimate cautions to those seeking greater children's participation, yet in this article I weigh these concerns against the transformative possibilities of children's participation, arguing that there are ways to conceptualize and support participation which complicate and challenge the potential of participation to impose western individualism, middle class values and to deepen young people's self-governance. With many others, I contend that it is important to recognize and foster children's participation, contingent on how it is conceptualized and practised. In making this argument I draw on both Michel Foucault's ethics of the self and social justice orientations towards more collective, democratic participatory practices, with a primary focus on children's participation in the school.

Advocacy for children's participation

Children's participation involves recognition that young people, from young children to older teenagers, are invested and competent social participants, that their views are valid and important, and that they should be formally involved in broader decision-making. The idea of children's participation has been evident within progressive circles earlier in the twentieth century, in the democratic schools movement (Hern, 2008) and in critical pedagogy (Apple & Beane, 1995) for instance, yet the idea has been significantly popularized and institutionalized over the last few decades, particularly in the United Kingdom, Northern Europe, and Australia.

In the process of this institutionalization, what is meant by participation has become fairly murky. As Black (2011) points out,

> The language of 'democratic citizenship', 'participatory citizenship' and 'democratic participation' is used in *almost* interchangeable ways that are nevertheless subject to constant mutation and debate (p. 464, Original emphasis).

Black contends that these many terms reflect a range of differing intentions for young people's participation. Many have argued for children's participation to foster a fairer society for children based on their participatory rights and to counter children's domination by adults (see Masschelein & Quaghebeur, 2005). For instance, democratic schools advocates (Hern, 2008) and rights-based student participation advocates (Covell & Howe, 2008) have taken such positions in seeking increased student involvement in school governance. Other advocates for children's participation are concerned with the more mainstream practice of enhancing young people's democratic skills and self-esteem to foster their future involvement in a healthier democratic societies (Hill, Davis, Prout, & Tisdall, 2004; Sinclair, 2004). Children's participation through citizenship education has similarly come to figure prominently as a strategy to develop young people's civic involvement, including future voting (Black, 2011). Other advocates for children participation primarily seek to improve policy and services by involving children, commonly in ways that are quite passive, e.g. consultation (Sinclair, 2004; Bessant, 2003) or limited student council representation (Whitty & Whisby, 2007).

A key influence on advocacy for children's participation has of course been the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989). Most notably Article 12 speaks of children's rights to have a say in decisions that affect them, ,contingent on their age and maturity, although participatory rights are also reflected in Article 13 (freedom of expression), Article 14 (freedom of thought, conscience, and religion), and Article 15 (freedom of association and peaceful assembly).

Calls for children's participation have been reflected in other trends as well. Childhood studies has contributed an important critique of dominant developmental and socialization theories for their emphasis on children as locked into a process of becoming; these academics have countered that we need to recognize children as beings in the present, as creating their own cultures, and as legitimate research participants (James & Prout, 1990). While children may have different skills from adults, they are considered here as competent social actors in a way that is frequently underestimated (Jones, 2009;

Smith, 2002). Also, guidance and humanistic approaches to early childhood education emphasize children's competence and seek children's choice-making and power-sharing (Porter, 1996). There has thus been advocacy in primary education for children's involvement in negotiating classroom dynamics in the hope that children will increase their investments in those dynamics and embrace education (see Millei, 2012).

Finally, within western culture, while children have lost significant autonomy in the public sphere through concerns about safety, their autonomy and influence have increased within the home and the realm of household consumption (Rutherford, 2009). Children have come to have an increasing role in family and personal decision-making around purchases, for instance (Pugh, 2009). As such, it has been argued that children's present lives are being reconceptualized as preparation to become consumer-driven, decision-making subjects (Bragg,2007), a shift resonant with a movement towards understanding people as consumers first, rather than citizens (Sinclair, 2004). This analysis links in to a broader view that is a central focus for this paper. Some researchers have suspected initiatives for children's participation to commonly reflect a more governmental than liberatory agenda: to foster children's involvement in decision-making as a way to ensure their developing autonomy, self-governance and individualized skills for future well-being within global neo-liberal capitalism (Vandenbroek & Bourverne-dibie, 2006).

What is this really achieving? Concerns about children's participation

The idea of children's participation has been challenged from a number of different angles. Discomfort with children's participation can be linked to beliefs that children do not have the sufficient capacities for such involvement, that it undermines adult authority and responsibility and that it erodes clear distinctions between children and adults (Hill et al., 2004). Others who advocate for children's rights and participation have been legitimately concerned that much participation is superficial and tokenistic (Bessant, 2003). These are not the kinds of critiques I focus on here, however; I concentrate instead on the critiques that draw on critical theory and governmentality studies to question what broader inequalities are being inadvertently supported by children's participatory initiatives, and what kinds of subjectivities are being produced. I focus on two specific arguments: that participatory initiatives deepen neo-liberal individualization that favours western, middle class values, and that these initiatives reflect a 'conduct of conduct' that ultimately seeks young people's complicity through self-regulation.

Participation deepens neo-liberal individualization

There are ways in which the language of children's participation initiatives resonate with current political and economic objectives (Bessant, 2003; Vandenbroek & Bourverne-dibie, 2006), potentially explaining its increased popularity (Bragg, 2007). Critics argue that shifts towards children's participation are grounded within the broader context of western neo-liberalism which favours privatization, liberalized trade, the erosion of the welfare state and individual autonomy over citizen interdependence (Burr, 2004;

Vandenbroek & Bourverne-de-bie, 2006). The ideal global, neoliberal subject is autonomous, self-reliant, responsible, and able to personally negotiate risk and the marketplace without relying on state support. Thus when families or schools are encouraged to involve children in decision-making, some have argued that this goal is really about creating the ideal, self-determined, autonomous, individualized child for a neo-liberal climate.[1] Similarly a focus on negotiation and participation prepares children to become consumer-driven, choice-making subjects rather than citizens. Through such neo-liberal processes, structural inequalities are obfuscated because the focus is on individualized responsibility and autonomy.

In support of this argument, Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005) draw on Foucault's work on governmentality in their review of participation advocacy literature to argue that it emphasises children as active and competent wherein children are expected to develop their individual capacities, to identify and articulate their needs, to hone their self-expression, and to solve problems. These goals are grounded in self-reflection, perspective-taking, communication, influence, and learning to act on one's own life. It is expected that participation will foster feelings of personal importance through self-confidence and responsibility, self-esteem and self-determination. Masschelein and Quaghebeur contend that this interpellation of students into conceiving of themselves and others as certain kinds of participants supports the self-making, free individual of neo-liberalism: 'people are invited (but also governed) to look at themselves as acting in and on their own interests, orientated towards self-determination and self-development' (Masschelein & Quaghebeur, 2005, p. 60).

Others have suggested that advocacy for children's participation favours verbal skills, confidence with those in authority, and individual self-assertion which specifically resonate with western, middle class cultural styles (e.g. see Lareau, 2003). Not only does a neo-liberal approach obscure social inequality, then, but an emphasis on children's participation can reproduce inequality as children's participation can be used to evaluate and regulate marginal families, e.g. by judging working class families for not involving children in family decision-making, or rewarding those students who begin school with participation skills already developed at home (Black, 2011; Vanderboek & Bourverne-de-Bie, 2006). Thus when it comes to children's choice-making, negotiation, and participation in school decision-making, middle class children's participatory skills can be considered a form of cultural capital that is rewarded.

The importation of western ideals of childhood has been another concern raised in response to the advocacy for participation rights in the CRC. For instance, Burr (2004) notes that the idea that children should have an individualized say in decision-making reflects an understanding of childhood that does not fit well with the family, hierarchical age-based and communal-focus of Vietnam. Murphy-Berman, Levesque, and Berman (1996) and Mason and Bolzan (2010) similarly emphasize how cultures vary considerably between a more independent and an interdependent or collectivist ethos. The approach to children's participation advocated in the CRC and various non-governmental organizations may thus be a challenge for those cultures that favour group interests over individuals' interests.

In sum, the above concerns suggest that the current emphasis on participation is naturalized as universally good when it really reflects, normalizes and prioritizes an individualistic, neo-liberal, largely western and middle class approach to understanding

personhood, childhood and participation. These concerns about neo-liberal participatory strategies resonate with the analysis of governmentality scholars who argue that instead of ensuring that children can shape their environments, have a voice and develop valuable skills, children's participation is a deepened form of young people's subjugation and complicity within this broader context (Millei, 2010, 2011; Pongratz, 2007; Vandenbroeck & Bourverne-de-bie, 2006).

Participation deepens young people's subjugation

Foucauldian governmentality studies suggest that broad, governmental processes such as the ones outlined by Masschelein and Quaghebeur shape behaviour and subjectivities such that we freely embrace our own governance (Foucault, 1978; Rose, 1990). Indeed, as Masschelein and Quaghebeur observe, participatory strategies can be considered governing through persuasion, which in turn excludes other 'possibilities for bringing freedom into practice' (p. 62).[2] A governmentality position does not simply refer to the state, but various levels of interactions, micro-practices, and expertise that produce subjectivities. For example, diffuse governmental processes produce our subjectivies through institutions, expertise that guides institutions and ourselves, and our own self-observation, correction and regulation. These can be thought of as techniques of the self, processes through which people can modify themselves, or adjust their own thoughts or conduct (Foucault, 1993, p. 203). Government, Foucault explains, is the point where techniques of domination (where people are driven to be a particular way) and techniques of the self interact. Young people's participation can thus be considered a governmental technique of the self which operates on various levels and with less visible effects than top-down rules and regulations because young people come to understand and embrace themselves as particular kinds of individuals (Masschelein & Quaghebeur, 2005).

Children, historically and currently, have been expected to obey adult authority, even if they do not wish to. Rather than fostering surface obedience (and direct resistance), children's participation can be understood as a technique for ensuring that children will instead freely internalize disciplinary aims and shape themselves in accordance with expected social norms. For example, Pongratz (2007) reflects on early twentieth century reform pedagogy which aimed to provide freedom for children through open seating structures, open learning plans and student participation in school organization. Pongratz sees these tactics as 'soft' forms of control based on panoptic surveillance and the discipline of the self in which 'the individual becomes an involuntary coproducer of the

control effects of social arrangements' (p.39). This process in turn masks possibilities for resistance because structures of power are diffuse, anonymous and linked back to the self. In this way, a very efficient form of governance has been achieved, for children's participation has deepened children's investments in their own self-discipline and conformity (Stasiulis, 2002).

In another example, Bragg (2007) reviews a project dedicated to enhancing student voice in school research. She found young people in this project were conceptualized as consumers looking for happiness, meaning and empowerment, having a will to participate, invested in organizational practices and embracing reflexivity. She argues that these processes fostered individualization, self-managing subjectivities, and hidden

control, particularly as project managers expected the empowerment of students to resonate with the interests of the school's administration. To Bragg these processes intensify relations of domination by commandeering children's souls: 'to give an inner commitment not just outer conformity' (2007, p. 356). For people interested in compliance and conformity, such self-governance may be considered the ideal organization of society, yet for those concerned with social justice, and who challenge processes of domination and subjugation, this 'conduct of conduct' is troubling.

These concerns are developed also by Millei (2011) in her work on guidance approaches in early childhood education. Millei agrees that guidance and humanist approaches to education foster particular kinds of self-regulating subjectivities based on fostering children's autonomy, freedom and confession. Again children come to be enlisted in their own domination through the development of competencies and confidences that are ultimately about adult-guided self-government. As Vandenbroek and Bourverne-di-bie (2006) state:

> Active citizenship can be seen as an empowering concept giving a voice to children, but it can also be considered as a technique assuring coercion or as a strategy that governs at a distance through the art of self-examination (p. 136).

Participation as a strategic tool?

The above concerns about children's participatory involvement are compelling. Participation becomes legitimately troubling when it is framed in terms of creating ideal, individualized, neo-liberal citizens who no longer recognize structural inequalities, or when relations of domination and subjugation are masked within discourses of self-empowerment. Yet while these are vital precautions to consider with regards to children's participation I argue that children's participation, in itself, is not inherently subjugating, neo-liberal, middle class or western. First, I draw on Foucault's care of the self to consider how governmental processes can facilitate challenges to domination through the development of skilled subjectivities, despite emphases on self-government. This position maintains links to individualism but also conceptualizes governmental processes as relevant to challenging domination. Second, I look to more critical orientations to children's participation to contend that it can also have collectivist, rather than individualist, orientations that have the capacity to de-centre middle class, western ideals.

Skilled subjectivities

Governmentality studies importantly suggest that we must always pay attention to the unforeseen complexities and hierarchies of institutional processes as they attempt to produce free individuals who, in turn, govern themselves. The effects of power are not uniform, nor easily guided (Gallagher, 2008), however. While governmentality studies explain the exercise of power in liberal democracies through cultivating individual conduct, they also suggest ambiguity. As Gallagher explains:

> ... by developing a human being's ability to govern herself, governmental power inevitably equips her to become an independent actor, no longer so beholden to externally imposed regulations. There is no reason to suppose that the power of agency will be concordant with the power of subjection (p. 401).

While initiatives to foster children's participation may be attempts to garner children's complicity, they also cultivate children's conceptualization of their own agency. Children's participation can thus be understood as a place of tension between governmental imperatives and young people's wills (Gallagher, 2008).

We can see this complexity in Foucault's later work on the care of the self wherein he explains that governmentality importantly includes strategies or tools that can challenge domination (1989). Foucault argued that through the care of the self we tend to ourselves and work to improve our inner character within the context of the rules and procedures of our own societies. Unlike techniques of the self, this work vitally involves reflection on the kinds of selves that we are making ourselves into. Besley and Peters (2007) argue that people, including children, can thus use strategies or tools in relation to themselves and others to become self-determining agents who can resist domination through 'both technologies of the self and ethical self-constitution' (p. 21).

Foucault (1989) argued that power relations involve our shifting attempts to control each other, which can only manifest within conditions of freedom. In contrast, domination exists when power relations are narrowed or frozen, thus preventing such practices of freedom. Some people legitimately guide and teach others (like a teacher, perhaps); the problem is when such authority is abused – as such, we need skills to respond effectively to such domination. Foucault's position on the ethics of the self is thus not simply about seeing people as constituted for their own regulation, but as constituted as free to understand the 'rules of the game' and thus to attempt to control each other through governmental strategies (1989). The care of the self here includes taking care of oneself within cultural rules of conduct, practising the art of good governing, and listening to a master when appropriate – but also mastery over oneself and the conscientious 'practice of freedom' (Foucault, 1989, p. 434). It is thus not possible to eradicate power relations but we can 'acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the ethos, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible' (p. 446). Expanding the idea that the care of the self resonates with children creates an understanding of young people as also able to participate in 'games of power'. This position thus recognizes the production of the capacity to engage with the possibilities of participation (Bragg, 2007). This care of the self is similarly reflected in Bronwyn Davies' (1990) position on agency when she argues that agency is contingent on discursive practices that constitute one as a speaker. She argues that teachers can develop a sense of agency in students, for example, by providing them with discursive, personal and social resources, including discourses suggesting that they are agentic. Such a sense of agency is linked to the skills and desire to be agentic beings, the scope to see alternatives, and access to others who will accept the discourse of their agency. These approaches to governance and agency remain linked to individual capacities but need not foster individualized agency that is necessarily complicit with dominating institutional imperatives or a neo-liberal agenda because they can be incisive, disruptive and also oriented to collective change, as I discuss below.

Can such technologies of governance really hold the same capacity for critical engagement among children as adults? While some might rightly suggest that the inequalities are too great between adults and children, which preclude their ability to fairly play these 'games of power', these hierarchies can alternatively suggest that it is particularly imperative to foster discourses and skills of voice, rights and participation in children in order to shift belief systems surrounding age-based inequalities. Such shifts do not create equality, but mediate existing hierarchies of control, competence, size, and resources. When young people are recognized, and recognize themselves, through discourses of personal or collective agency, involvement and democracy, even individual rights, they are produced as legitimate participants in the social realm, expecting consultation and opportunities to challenge unfairness (Davies, 1990; Raby, 2008). While students' participation can thus create a shared investment in decisions that foster self-regulation, it also generates the self-identity and associated skills for seeing inconsistency or duplicity, for envisioning what participation should or could look like, and for strategizing a response. Self-understanding, and the skills to support it can therefore expose and weaken adult domination and complicate the expectations of 'obedient' self-governance – even when such expectations are hidden within instrumental calls for children's participation.

Participation as a collective focus

A second response to concerns that children's participation initiatives foster neoliberal and governmental goals focuses instead on fostering more collectivist subjectivities oriented to social justice. Within critical pedagogy, for example, democratic community-building is premised on connections between self-reflexive individuals who are socially conscious, aware of difference, and responsive to each other (Kincheloe, 2007). In this way, young people's participatory engagement projects have the capacity to de-centre neoliberal ideals. While much of the current participatory agenda as it is put into practice concentrates on narrow, individualizing projects such as voting and fostering autonomous skill, as Leal (2007) argues with reference to community participation in global development projects, the counter-hegemonic history of participation is one that needs to be recovered.

Leal criticizes the empty gestures towards community participation in global development projects which focus on such buzz-words as 'community needs assessment', 'empowerment' and 'stakeholder analysis' that really support a global, neoliberal agenda over local needs. He laments that participatory discourse in community development has been deployed by the World Bank, for instance, suggesting that empowerment arises through freedom from state intervention: 'as such ... participatory action was consequently *re*-politicised in the service of the conservative neo-liberal agenda' (2007, p. 544). Leal counters that activists need to reconnect with the more radical roots of participatory democracy, in the work of Freirian Participatory Action Research, for instance, that focuses on grassroots struggle intent on identifying and challenging oppressive structures.

Similar arguments can be made in reference to young people's participation. A democratization of governance requires meaningful, participatory involvement from all relevant stakeholders (Edwards, 2010), which includes broadening what counts as

knowledge to encompass diverse children's understandings and interpretations, broadening relevant spheres of participation beyond only formal, adult-oriented venues (Gaventa, 2004), and overtly recognizing and attempting to mediate the inequalities that exist between young people and adults (Bessant, 2003).[3]

Participation also means involvement in a collective process that requires negotiation, and recognition of the needs of others (as individuals and as collectivities): as decision-making is linked to the broader aims of a group, representatives must convey the vision of the group, the focus is on cooperation and compromise, and there is a consideration and accommodation of social inequalities with the aim of addressing them.[4] As such these processes may still produce individualized subjectivities, skills and self-knowledge, but ones that do not prioritize individual autonomy. Masschelein and Quaghebeur (2005) argue that the governmentality of participation locates the individual as being free and unaffected by dependency – yet participation can, and has been, conceptualized as the opposite: we are always interdependent, and unable to move forward in collective decision-making if it is only understood as an individual project. Furthermore, while forms of participation that currently proliferate may reproduce individualized self-expression and self-regulation that is notably western, participation in decision-making is certainly not an exclusively western, middle class or neo-liberal value. On the contrary, Rampal (2008) argues that in India, for example, it is the rise of middle class hegemony over the educational process, and influence of neo-liberal educational strategies, that has shifted educational contexts *away* from the more collective, participatory educational contexts that were promoted as part of the Gandhian, anti-colonial vision.

One participatory initiative that seeks collective, meaningful engagement across difference is the Citizen Schools of Porto Alegre Brazil, described by Gandin and Apple (2002). Gandin and Apple see this initiative as reflecting a 'thick' democracy rather than a neo-liberal, 'thin' democracy, 'enabling even the poorest of its citizens to participate in deliberations over the policies themselves and over where and how money should be spent' (p. 260). Porto Alegre is a very poor region of Brazil and had a high (and early) drop out rate. As part of a wider initiative of participatory budgeting, Citizen Schools institutionalized forms of decision-making involving parents, students[5] and staff at multiple levels. Part of the process has involved redefining knowledge to include what is meaningful in the community, often arising from shared oppression. Participation also requires equal gender representation. As part of her broader analysis of young women activists across the Americas, Taft (2011) similarly describes agrupaciones, student centres in Buenos Aires which act as social movement spaces. These student centres do political education, community work and influence educational policy through the founding premise of 'an assertion of students' democratic rights to decision-making power within their schools' (2011, p. 50). Taft argues that in these and other fora of girls' activism, their participation is understood as 'deeply and intensely collective' (p. 135) – the girls self-fashion as activists but through community rather than consumerism. These are just several examples of non-western, school-based student participation which seeks to ensure the representation of more marginalized groups, which engage with local, student concerns, and which link to collectivist as opposed to individualist goals.

The above examples focus primarily on teenage participation, but younger children's participation can similarly be understood through a more collectivist lens, which some democratic schools have sought to foster through group decision-making, in terms of

school rules for example (e.g. the Albany Free School, see Hern, 2008). *Seen and heard: Children's rights in early childhood education* (Hall & Rudkin, 2011) provides a detailed example of such nursery-level student participation based on the Regio Emilia approach at Boulder Journey School in the United States. Hall and Rudkin's framework draws on the language of rights, which individualizes participation. However, the authors' orientation also links a rights analysis to a social justice lens that compares and contrasts children's rights to other social movements in American history. Furthermore, Hall and Rudkin provide detailed examples of children's sense of themselves as competent participants engaged in shared decision-making, and with a strong sense of social responsibility towards the group. Through their text, the authors illustrate how very young children think about, and can be fostered to think about, children's rights as relational rights.

Conclusion

While children's participation has roots in social justice approaches aimed towards significant social change, current policy in children's participation has rightly raised concerns about the narrow production of self-governing subjectivities that resonate with neo-liberal individualism. Yet participation can be understood and enacted in a variety of ways. Individualized participation can ensure the recognition and dispute of domination as part of processes of self-governance; participation can also be framed through discourses of collective concern, diversity, and challenging inequality. A commitment to such participation for young people remains difficult however: it needs to recognize and attempt to redress children's unequal social location, challenge discourses which conceptualize young people as incompetent, accept that some young people may not wish to participate, and include an ability for young people to disrupt established ways of doing things — including introducing anti-democratic ideas and actions as part of the democratic process (Apple & Beane, 1995). There remain many obstacles to nurturing such participation. These include tokenism, deeply held beliefs about children's developmental incompetence that prevent their being seriously involved in decision-making processes, age-based inequalities of size, skill and dependency, hierarchies among children themselves and the rewarding of potentially class-based participatory skills. These are daunting challenges and many current institutionalized children's participatory initiatives fail to tackle them (Black, 2011). Children participate already in the creation of social interaction and practices, however often without acknowledgement, they have legitimate views on, and investments in, what such social interaction and practices should look like, and they face many instances of domination. The goal and value of embracing such participation remains laudable for its capacity to foster subjectivities that can challenge domination and that are oriented towards collective concern and social justice. Governmental processes of participation have been rightly troubled for fostering subtle domination through technologies of self-governance, yet it can also be argued that thoughtful initiatives towards children's participation can foster self-understanding and skills for children to be engaged governmental subjects who can more fully participate in 'games of power' and also collectively identify domination and respond to it.

Notes

[1] It has also been argued that the current emphasis on student voice reflects a neoliberal agenda by undermining the teaching profession by providing students with more say than teachers (Whitty and Whisby, 2007).

[2] In a related argument, Bessant (2003) contends that emphasis on young people's participatory self-governance coincides with the rise of discourses of youth at risk alongside a decline in state funding. To resolve the concomitant dilemma, states have embraced a narrow conceptualization of young people's participation to address youth problems.

[3] Mason and Bolzan (2010) caution that empowerment rhetoric can have negative consequences for children if it means separating them as individuals from the supportive context of their communities, however. Those advocating child participation thus face a challenge if facilitating children's participation also destabilizes the cultures that support and sustain them.

[4] Black (2011) and many others are importantly concerned that participatory projects often exclude marginalized young people. Advocates for democratic participatory projects with a social justice orientation struggle to seek such inclusion – this is not always successful, but much advocacy for participation includes various tactics for engaging with, and centring, those on the margins in the interests of social transformation (Percy-Smith & Thomas, 2010).

[5] This initiative only involves students after the age of 12, however, which is a weakness. Through interviews with 140 students between ages 11 and 21 in Rio de Janeiro, de Castro (2012) also found that despite projects working towards democratic participation in schools in Brazil, young people largely continue to feel little legitimate voice due to the perseverance of developmental discourses that prioritize adult views and responsibilities over those of young people. de Castro's research indicates how difficult it is to shift away from dominant discourses of children's incompetency.

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