Children's Right to Participate: The Lundy Model Applied to Early Childhood Education and Care

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Abstract

Children have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them, and to have them considered and given due weight. Children's participation is most meaningful when rooted in children's everyday lives, and its promotion should be encouraged from the youngest ages, especially in early childhood education and care (ECEC). In this paper we apply the Lundy model of participation, widely used in policy, practice and professional development initiatives, to the ECEC context. Based on examples provided by ECEC professionals from Belgium, Greece, Poland, and Portugal, we illustrate the implementation of the elements of space, voice, audience and influence, proposed by the Lundy model. We also discuss the interrelations among these elements and the need for organisational and contextual support to enhance children's participation. This paper adds to existing literature, highlighting theoretical and practical issues associated with the promotion of children's right to participate in ECEC.

Keywords

children's right to participate – early childhood education – Lundy model of participation – participation

The right of all children to be heard and to have their views taken seriously, in accordance with their age and maturity, is established in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). Specifically, children must have the opportunity to express their views in all matters affecting them, and to have them considered and given due weight, in the diverse contexts they attend or live in (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010; United Nations General Assembly, 1989).

The European Union (EU) Strategy on the Rights of the Child, recently developed with the participation of children, with the aim of promoting their rights in all aspects of life, highlights the importance of developing actions to empower children to be active citizens and members of democratic societies. Under this strategy, the European Commission has committed to promote events with children as participants; to conduct child-specific consultations for relevant initiatives; and to strengthen expertise and practice on child participation among the EU agencies' staff (European Commission, 2021).

Before launching this strategy, the European Commission had acknowledged the Lundy model of participation (Lundy, 2007), which conceptualised children's right to participate, as defined by Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (European Commission, n.d.). In this conceptual paper, we address the implementation of the Lundy model in early childhood education and care (ECEC), illustrating with data collected with ECEC professionals, how the diverse elements foreseen by the model can be applied to this specific context.

The Lundy model was developed with the aim of drawing policymakers' attention to the distinct, though interrelated, elements of *space*, *voice*, *audience* and *influence* (Lundy, 2007). According to Lundy, *space* requires that children are given safe and inclusive opportunities to express a view; *voice* requires that children are enabled to express their views freely; *audience* means that children's views must be listened to; and *influence* means that children's views must be acted upon, as appropriate. The interrelatedness of these four elements is an important aspect of the model, which acknowledges the overlap between *space* and *voice* (both related to the "Right to have a view"), and between *audience* and *influence* (related to the "Right to have views given due weight"). The Lundy model suggests that Article 12 first requires ensuring children's right to express a view and then, ensuring children's right to have that view given due weight. Further, it acknowledges that decision-making processes are rarely static and anticipates that once children are informed of the extent of their *influence*, the process may initiate again (Lundy, 2007).

This model has been extensively applied to practice, namely in the fields of child welfare (Kennan *et al.*, 2018) and primary education (Harmon, 2020).

Research has also documented its use with adults (i.e., practitioners, parents) supported by children's services (e.g., early childhood education, training, health services) (Moore, 2019). In effect, the Lundy model may be applied to work with children across different fields and contexts. Nonetheless, to our knowledge, it has not been applied to ECEC, in the European context, although existing guidelines for the early years, in Australia, already propose the Lundy model as a way of planning children's participation (Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2020). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to illustrate the use of the Lundy model to support children's participation in ECEC settings. Although ECEC settings encompass formal, regulated arrangements providing education and care for children from zero to five/six years old (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019), in this paper we put particular emphasis on children aged three to five/six.

1   Children's Right to Participate in ECEC

Participation is most meaningful when rooted in children's everyday lives (Hart, 1992; Lansdown, 2005a) and should be encouraged from the youngest ages (Council of Europe, 2017; United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005). As young children spend considerable time in ECEC settings (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019), these contexts have become fundamental microsystems for supporting children's participation (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), with ECEC professionals – from teachers/pedagogues, to assistants and coordinators – working as *gatekeepers* in this process (Gal, 2017). Moreover, by establishing links with families and local communities, ECEC professionals have the power to communicate the mission/value and practice of children's participation and thus create a strong mesosystem with an aim to promote seamless participatory experiences for children in both formal and informal spaces (Council of Europe, 2020).

Children's participation has been described as fundamental to ensure ECEC quality (Sheridan and Samuelsson, 2001) which, in turn, is instrumental in promoting positive developmental outcomes (e.g., Broekhuizen *et al.*, 2018; Bryant *et al.*, 2010). In recent years, there have been efforts to develop high-quality standards to guide ECEC professional practices. For instance, the network "Children in Europe", established ten key principles for services and institutions working for children. One of these principles refers to participation, described as an essential value allowing the expression of democracy, the promotion of inclusion and the construction of shared projects (Luciano, 2016). Therefore,

in high-quality ECEC, children's active and meaningful participation is valued and supported (European Commission, 2014).

Research does suggest that children in high-quality settings seem to report, to a larger extent, that they are listened to and that teachers know what they like to do (Sheridan and Samuelsson, 2001), reporting more opportunities to participate and to exert *influence* (Sheridan, 2007). In addition, research has documented links between participation practices, observed teacher-child interactions' quality, and children's participation experiences in ECEC (Correia *et al.*, 2020a). Specifically, fewer practices focusing on decision-making exclusively by the ECEC teacher (i.e., imposing decisions about the schedule, activities, rules, areas, or materials, based on teachers' own goals and not considering children's views or interests) have been linked with higher levels of observed children's choice, which in turn associates with higher levels of children's perceived participation (Correia *et al.*, 2020a). Moreover, decreased decision-making exclusively by ECEC teachers (i.e., again, imposing decisions on children, without considering their views), has been associated with increased observed emotional support in ECEC classrooms (i.e., interactions characterised by positive relationships, affect, communication, and respect), which, in turn, associate with increased perceived participation by children (Correia *et al.*, 2020a).

Further, research has documented professionals' misconceptions (e.g., the idea that professionals must control the content and relations of children's play, or views of children as subjects and not as agents), lack of awareness (e.g., of children's competences to participate, from an early age) (e.g., Bae, 2009; Emilson and Folkesson, 2006), and challenges (e.g., bureaucracy, lack of human resources, lack of time, heavy workload) as obstacles to the promotion of children's participation (Correia *et al.*, 2020b). Therefore, promoting effective, meaningful and high-quality opportunities for children's participation requires building professionals' awareness and skills towards implementing their right to participate (Emilson and Folkesson, 2006; European Commission, 2014). Relatedly, professional development and reflexive practices have been described as a means to support professionals in creating and improving the conditions for children's participation, by enabling positive environments, skills and attitudes towards listening to and adequately responding to children, while also raising awareness on broader issues such as power and adult-child interactions (Mesquita-Pires, 2012).

The Lundy model of participation (Lundy, 2007) constitutes a useful framework to guide the implementation of children's participation in ECEC. In this paper, we apply the Lundy model to the ECEC context, providing examples

that illustrate how the elements of *space*, *voice*, *audience* and *influence* can be used to support children's participation. Simultaneously, we acknowledge the multilevel and cooperative efforts needed to maximise the identification, use and sustainability of resources and practices towards the promotion of children's participation. Hence, for each of these four elements, we describe practices and strategies at the organisational (e.g., centre) and/or contextual (e.g., family, community) level, recognising the need for multi-layered approaches and close collaboration by distinct professionals (e.g., ECEC teachers, assistants, coordinators) and stakeholders (e.g., families, policymakers), towards promoting children's participation.

2   Data used to illustrate Elements of the Lundy Model

Excerpts included in this manuscript were used to illustrate the elements of the Lundy model. They were collected during focus groups conducted in European countries representing diverse sociocultural contexts, more specifically in Belgium, Greece, Poland, and Portugal, within the scope of [PARTICIPA Erasmus+ project], a project aiming to support the promotion of children's participation rights in ECEC, through professional development. A total of 97 ECEC professionals – 23.71 per cent from Belgium, 32.99 per cent from Greece, 17.53 per cent from Poland, and 25.77 per cent from Portugal – participated in 16 focus groups conducted in the four countries. In total, 56 ECEC teachers/pedagogues, 15 assistants and 26 coordinators participated. Across participating countries, a qualification level (i.e., degree or master's degree) is required for ECEC teachers/pedagogues (i.e., professionals responsible for the ECEC classroom and group of children) and coordinators (i.e., professionals responsible for coordinating the ECEC staff and monitoring services and resources), but not for assistants (i.e., professionals assisting the work of the other ECEC professionals in the classrooms/centre), who generally have low qualifications (e.g., secondary education) (e.g., European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019).

In each country, respecting its ECEC features, professionals were selected based on the following criteria: (a) being an ECEC teacher/pedagogue, an ECEC assistant, or an ECEC coordinator working in an ECEC classroom/centre; (b) working with children aged between two and six years-old; and (c) being recognised in the field as providers of high-quality ECEC, based on participatory approaches. In addition, the experiences of professionals working in diverse sectors of ECEC systems (e.g., public, private for profit, private non-profit) and geo-social contexts (e.g., urban, rural) were also considered.

All professionals provided written consent to participate in the focus groups, which were organised by type of professional and conducted from March to April 2020. Focus groups lasted from 45 to 90 minutes, were audio-recorded and transcribed. A detailed analysis of the focus groups is available from the authors.

3 The Lundy Model of Participation Applied to the ECEC Context

In this section, we present our proposal for applying the Lundy model of participation to the ECEC context. Each element of the Lundy model and related organisational and contextual support practices and strategies are illustrated with excerpts of professionals' discourses, selected from the focus groups, aiming to highlight the conditions that may facilitate the promotion of children's participation.

3.1 *Space*

Space, as defined within the Lundy model, is based on the premise that children must be given the opportunity to express a view. The creation of a *space* in which children are encouraged to express their views (Lundy, 2007) is a prerequisite for the meaningful participation of children in decision-making affecting them. It means the creation of a safe and inclusive *space* for all children. Moreover, it implies that adults,

> … take proactive steps to encourage children to express their views; that is, to invite and encourage their input rather than simply acting as a recipient of views if children happen to provide them.
> LUNDY, 2007: 934

Applying the element of *space* to the ECEC context involves the promotion of a positive *space* for child participation, at both the social and the physical levels:

> I think the teacher's job is to provide children with a friendly, inspiring space. The physical space is important but also what is in it, this atmosphere.
> ECEC Teacher, Poland

Moreover, it involves the promotion of a participatory *space* within the entire centre, involving diverse stakeholders (Council of Europe, 2020). Therefore, ensuring the element of *space* in ECEC requires (a) promoting a positive social

space in the ECEC classroom/centre, (b) improving the physical *space* in the ECEC classroom/centre, and (c) promoting a participatory *space* for all members of the centre and ECEC stakeholder community.

At the social level, the promotion of a positive social *space* involves high-quality interactions, characterised by emotional support, based on positive emotional connections between adults, adults and children, and among children (Pianta *et al.*, 2008):

> ... When this child does not answer what I expected ..., I notice I am proud. I take him individually with me and tell him I'm proud of him. In case students cannot speak the language or it is just difficult to communicate, I encourage them to speak about whatever they want. I want students to feel good.
>
> ECEC Teacher, Belgium

Notably, the promotion of such a positive social *space* must take place throughout the day and across diverse routines taking place in ECEC, as illustrated in the following example:

> ... [It is important to] create space and routines for child participation in your regular schedule. For example, brainstorming, talking during circle time, when starting the morning routine.
>
> ECEC Teacher, Belgium

More specifically, the positive climate in the ECEC classroom/centre is based on a respectful attitude, comfort and sensitivity. A respectful attitude is characterised by eye contact, warm voice, respectful language, cooperation, non-verbal cues and trustful relationships. Comfort is illustrated by children's willingness to seek support, freedom of movements and freedom to take risks, in accordance with classroom rules, jointly defined. Sensitivity refers to ECEC professionals' awareness and responsiveness to children's skills, needs, emotions, interests, preferences and difficulties, acknowledging children's emotions, and providing assistance and individualised support (Mesquita-Pires, 2012; Pianta *et al.*, 2008). The following example illustrates the importance of trustful relationships:

> To give a good example, when children came in the morning, I used to kneel to hug and welcome them with a smile. It is the most important thing for me to gain children's trust and to make them understand and feel that I love and care about them so that they come closer to me and

communicate with trust and openness. And it is important to keep your voice low.

ECEC Coordinator, Greece

At the physical level, enabling child participation involves the provision of enough *space* to play and move, allowing flexible use of materials, and providing opportunities for all children to take initiative (Council of Europe, 2020). In effect, ensuring an inclusive physical *space* that considers children's learning processes and achievements, and is responsive to their different profiles (e.g., cultural) and needs, is very important for the promotion of children's right to participate. This inclusive physical *space* may involve, for instance, the existence of a relaxation area, where children can rest or hide for a while throughout the day, whenever they need it. The next excerpt illustrates how features of the physical *space* and child participation are connected in ECEC:

> … Unless we have enough space, we can't promote children's participation. For example, if I want to have more organized corners and to promote children's free choice and interaction with the materials, I need space.
>
> ECEC Assistant, Greece

Materials constitute an important part of the physical *space*. To ensure children's participation, materials need to be easily accessible and clearly labelled; varied regarding themes and use (e.g., books, toys and natural materials, if possible unstructured and open ended), and adequate to children's age, size and emerging skills. Moreover, materials must be sufficient (e.g., several exemplars available, or used with clear rules established with children) and reflect children's diversity, contributing to their sense of belonging (e.g., book characters from diverse backgrounds). The next sentence exemplifies the importance of making materials available, so children can choose and use them:

> Yes, [our role in promoting participation] I think it is always providing … having materials ready to be used … paper, inks … our children go to the painting board, they can paint whatever they want … We must always have the materials ready, and they must always be replaced because they are always using them.
>
> ECEC Assistant, Portugal

Furthermore, the promotion of a positive *space* enabling children's participation extends to the entire centre (Council of Europe, 2020). This entails a positive climate among ECEC professionals with different functions and responsibilities (e.g., coordinators, teachers and assistants), as stated in the following excerpt:

> It is important to work as a team. Everybody should behave the same way ... a smile, a good word, an encouragement by all, the assistants, the cook, the coordinator, the pedagogues.
>
> ECEC Pedagogue, Greece

In addition to ensuring good relationships among ECEC professionals working directly with children, promoting a positive *space* also requires collaboration with children's families, and with the diverse stakeholders within the community (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Council of Europe, 2020). The following example illustrates the relevance of cooperation, which is characterised by shared responsibility and power balance among all stakeholders, as described by an ECEC professional:

> Conversation, communication, and cooperation. This concerns not only the staff, but everyone, including children and parents. All this together creates a participatory atmosphere. I am not above the teacher, in such an unreasonable way, the child is not under the teacher and the parent under the staff. Together, we are creating this community having different responsibilities and rights.
>
> ECEC Coordinator, Poland

3.2   *Voice*

Voice, as described in the Lundy model, involves encouraging children to express their views. Importantly, 'children's right to express their views is not dependent upon their capacity to express a mature view; it is dependent only on their ability to form a view, mature or not' (Lundy, 1997: 935). There are prerequisites to meaningful and effective child participation, such as sufficient time to understand relevant issues and access to child-friendly documentation and information (Lundy, 1997).

Promoting the expression of children's views within ECEC, in meaningful and relevant ways, involves acknowledging and respecting young children's competence, dignity and responsibility (Gallagher *et al.*, 2017; Lansdown, 2005b). Respecting children's competence means recognising their capability to communicate, to understand the feelings and perspectives of others, and to

choose and understand consequences of actions. Respecting children's dignity requires valuing adults and children equally. Honouring children's responsibility implies sharing responsibility with them. In the following example, an ECEC coordinator refers to the importance of listening to children's *voice* and respecting children's competence.

> I was left with a sentence that I know almost by memory: "a transformative pedagogy that believes in the child with rights, listens to his/her voice, trusts his/her competence to make the activity, the educational action into a shared activity". I think this is it.
>
> ECEC Coordinator, Portugal

Notwithstanding, respecting children's competence, dignity and responsibility is not enough to promote the expression of children's *voice(s)*. It also requires (a) providing information in developmentally appropriate ways; (b) identifying relevant topics for children to become involved in; (c) facilitating multiple forms of expressing views; and (d) building children's capacity to express views, interests and preferences.

Providing children with access to sufficient, appropriate and transparent information (e.g., what are the available options for an activity) is essential to ensure the expression of their *voices* and views (Pinto *et al.*, 2020). The following example illustrates a way of providing children with information about possible activities:

> Sometimes I use an overview sheet with several possible activities depicted with an icon to actually help them [children] make a choice or to work out their plan. So, suppose they have a penguin with them and they say, "I don't really know what I want to do with it", then they have the chance to see on that sheet various kinds of activities and they can be inspired by one of them.
>
> ECEC Teacher, Belgium

Providing information not only allows children to express themselves in ways meaningful to them, but also helps them to make decisions. For instance, when appropriately informed, children may decide if they want, or not, to participate in a certain activity, as stated in the following example.

> … I would like to tell you about a boy from my group who absolutely did not want to take part in the play. We respected his decision. During the preparations he was sitting next to the group, sometimes would leave

and do something different. I think that because we have respected his decision, when the next event was organised, he agreed to perform. It proves that respecting the decision of the child to withdraw may actually encourage him/her to participate.

ECEC Teacher, Poland

Notably, information provided to children must be appropriate to their age, language, culture, physical and cognitive skills, and consider their current disposition. Also, it should be provided in diverse and child-friendly formats (e.g., story books, animations) that recognises diversity. Simultaneously, having the time to understand issues that are presented to them and being supported by ECEC professionals in making sense of the information they are provided with is also fundamental for children to use their *voice* (Lansdown *et al.*, 2014).

Identifying relevant topics for children is essential to assure the expression of their views. In effect, both the topics and the ways in which children express themselves should be meaningful to them. For instance, ECEC professionals may help children identify relevant topics by asking them about their interests and needs, and by informing them about current and future plans. This can be done, for example, by questioning children during an informal interview, or during critical incidents in the daily life of the ECEC classroom/setting (Formosinho and Araújo, 2004). Importantly, children need time to evaluate if an activity is relevant to them. After identifying the relevant topics, all children for whom a certain activity or project is relevant should be enabled to participate (Pinto *et al.*, 2020).

Children also need multiple opportunities to express themselves and should be able to do it in multiple forms, for example by using puppets, or through drawings and play (Clark, 2005). Listening walks (Gallagher *et al.*, 2017), focusing on listening competences, and the mosaic approach (Clark and Moss, 2005), which advocates for listening through diverse channels and combining methods such as photography, role plays and other forms of expression, are described as pedagogic methods with the potential to create opportunities for expanded listening. Therefore, ECEC professionals need to be able to identify children's interests and preferences, respecting their characteristics and skills, regardless of their age, gender, or socioeconomic status, when encouraging them to express their *voices*. In addition, ECEC professionals need to be aware of children who may require additional attention and support (Hill, 2006). In the next example, an ECEC professional tackled the importance of supporting shy or multilingual children:

> We don't try to work in the big circle anymore. I do as little as possible with the entire class and do everything in small groups. For example, reading a story, or a circle discussion about the weekend, we all try to integrate this in our corner work. Because our quiet children, who are afraid to chat in the large group, sometimes tell a lot more in small groups. That's what we're really working on this year.
>
> ECEC Teacher, Belgium

Valuing all children's ideas (e.g., expressed during a presentation in the classroom), building on their previous experiences (e.g., shared during circle time), using appealing materials (e.g., toys, cards), and respecting children's time to express themselves (e.g., through photographs, drawings), allowing them to share a new idea, propose a new project, start or present a new topic to the adults and/or to the group, are relevant practices for enabling young children's *voices* (Formosinho and Figueiredo, 2014; Formosinho and Araújo, 2007; Hill, 2006). The following sentence illustrates a way of promoting the expression of children's *voice*, as described by an ECEC professional:

> ... Promote conversation in small circle with cards: ... Monday is the open morning time in my class. Students sit at a table. There are four cards on each table. A card with a backpack means that the students have brought something about a theme about which they want to talk about.
>
> ECEC Teacher, Belgium

Building children's capacity to express their views, interests and preferences helps children become active agents, capable of providing meaningful contributions and of influencing decisions affecting them (e.g., Hart and Brando, 2018; Sen, 2004). Moreover, it helps children express their beliefs, feelings and claims to others; start or enter a conversation with adults and their peers; choose and decide for themselves and with others, while also imagining, proposing and creating new activities and projects (Gallagher *et al.*, 2017).

Further, promoting the expression of children's *voice* in ECEC requires joint efforts within the centre, by all ECEC professionals. These efforts involve sharing information and strategies on why and how professionals can support the expression of children's views in their daily planning, or jointly reflecting, and supporting each other in overcoming challenges (Mesquita-Pires, 2012). Similarly, being aware of the conditions and the support available, both from the centre and other ECEC professionals, is essential for professionals to promote the expression of children's views. The following example illustrates the

importance of adopting shared strategies to promote the expression of children's views:

> ... One of the strategies that we, as a team, have adopted, recently, for child participation, and that has been successful, I think, is the construction of the portfolio that continues to be a great challenge because every year, every day, every month, we learn. But I think that work tool has given a physical voice [to participation] that is registered for posterity.
>
> ECEC Coordinator, Portugal

3.3   *Audience*

Audience, as defined by the Lundy model, assumes that children's views must be listened to, by someone with responsibility to make decisions. In fact, as stated in the model, 'children have a right to have their views listened to (not just heard) by those involved in the decision-making processes' (Lundy, 2007: 936). This suggests the need to '... ensure children at least have a "right of *audience*" – a guaranteed opportunity to communicate views to an identifiable individual or body with the responsibility to listen' (Lundy, 2007: 937).

Despite the presumed overlap between *audience* and *voice* (i.e., children's *voices* need an *audience*, and the audience must listen to children's voices)*, audience* goes beyond *voice*. In effect, by providing an audience, ECEC professionals support children in identifying those relevant for decision-making and place responsibility on key adults to listen to young children (Pinto *et al.*, 2020). The existence of an engaged *audience* and of recognisable adults with the responsibility to listen, are necessary preconditions to make children's voices visible and heard (Johnson, 2017; Macnamara, 2013).

Ensuring children's views, needs, interests and expectations are listened to and given due weight in ECEC means: (a) providing children with the opportunity to have an *audience* or someone to whom they can communicate their views (e.g., the ECEC teacher, the assistant, the centre's coordinator); and (b) ensuring there is a process for listening and considering children's views. These conditions are important to promote meaningful and effective forms of participation, showing that children's perspectives matter (Council of Europe, 2020). The next example illustrates the identification of a person with decision-making responsibility within the community:

> ... When we were doing the project "Entrepreneurial Children", children were investigating what was going on in their locality. They concluded that in their village, which is very small, many children, with their parents, have to cross the road on their way to the kindergarten. After long

> discussions in the group, they came to the conclusion that they needed to go to the municipality office, to the mayor, and tell him that in their opinion there should be a sign on the road and a fence separating it from the road …
>
>   ECEC Coordinator, Poland

Providing an *audience* for children's views can be done both at the individual and the collective level (Council of Europe, 2020). At the individual level, it can refer, for instance, to listening to children's preferred activities or play areas. At the collective level, it may refer to organising an assembly to listen to children's views on projects or issues concerning the group or the ECEC centre. The following example illustrates the provision of an *audience* at the ECEC centre level:

> … In the school assemblies, each classroom has a delegate. They [children] took the drawing and they shared the project, the idea that we wanted to build and everybody, of course, everybody was enthusiastic … At the school, currently we have a school assembly, involving preschool, two classrooms, and primary school. There isn't a specific moment, so it isn't a school assembly with a schedule, or something like that. But when there is a matter of everyone's interest, usually they do that … It is the school philosophy, to call the students and listen …
>
>   ECEC Coordinator, Portugal

Active listening (involving understanding, responding and retaining what children say, taking the time to understand their views) and attentive observation (requiring paying close attention to children's behaviours and all forms of expression, to understand their views) can be useful tools to ensure an *audience* for children (Alasuutari, 2014; Clark and Moss, 2005; Hill, 2006; Rinaldi, 2001). The following statement illustrates an example of how to promote active listening and attentive observation:

> … I do not plan anything on Friday afternoon. Children can show their interests and I have time to listen and follow their leads, giving them attention. This gives me time to observe the children, play with them, see children's interests and ideas.
>
>   ECEC Teacher, Belgium

Ensuring a process for listening to and considering children's views in ECEC requires a shared understanding, among professionals, about its relevance

(Clark, 2005). The adoption of a positive attitude regarding children's views and the identification of who, in the centre, has decision-making responsibilities, constitute necessary steps within the process of providing an *audience* (Pinto *et al.*, 2020). Further, the provision of an *audience* involves clear communication among all ECEC professionals and children, and the clear identification of with whom children can share their ideas (e.g., ECEC teacher, assistant, coordinator), in case they want to do so. The following illustrates the consideration for children's views, by a director:

> They were heard and the other day … the director was passing by, he addressed a child and said: 'I thought about what you said, and we are trying to solve it'. I think it's a way for them to really feel integrated and to be heard.
>
>   ECEC Assistant, Portugal

Guaranteeing an *audience* may also involve the community. The identification of who, within the community, has decision-making responsibilities, is relevant to ensure children's views are considered, for instance, by a local decision-maker (Council of Europe, 2020). All stakeholders (e.g., ECEC professionals, families, community services, municipalities) are therefore encouraged to interact, collaborate and support each other in providing an *audience* for children's *voices*. The following example documents this cooperation:

> [About a tree-house project] It came from children, it started from a group of children and then we got the involvement of the mayor, the whole municipality, the parents' association … Together we are creating this community having different responsibilities and rights. We all need to be able to answer the child.
>
>   ECEC Coordinator, Portugal

3.4   *Influence*

Children's views must be acted upon, as appropriate. This is the premise underlying *influence*, as stated by the Lundy model (Lundy, 2007). Specifically, the model proposes that, '… at some point, attention needs to focus on the extent of *influence*; what constitutes the "due" in the "due weight".' (Lundy, 2007: 937). Lundy adds that the –

> … challenge is to find ways of ensuring that adults not only listen to children but that they take children's views seriously. While this cannot be universally guaranteed, one incentive/safeguard is to ensure that children

> are told how their views were considered. Often children are asked for
> their views and then not told what became of them; that is, whether they
> had any *influence* or not.
>
> LUNDY, 2007: 938

Applying the Lundy model to the ECEC context requires that children's views
are embedded within decision-making affecting the ECEC setting everyday
life (Lundy, 2007; Sinclair, 2004). This involves (a) assuring children's views
are acted upon, as appropriate, (b) ensuring children's *influence* is planned
and organised, (c) providing multiple levels of *influence*, (d) monitoring chil-
dren's *influence*, and (e) providing children with feedback. Notably, it is adults'
responsibility to empower children's agency, so children can actively partici-
pate in decision-making processes, having the opportunity to identify an ade-
quate, responsive audience with whom to discuss their ideas and plans (Welty
and Lundy, 2013).

  Children's views must be acted upon, whenever appropriate, regarding deci-
sions taking place in the ECEC centre. These decisions include a wide range of
issues, such as the negotiation of rules, problem and conflict-solving, planning
a new activity or project, choosing what materials to buy, or even extending
their *influence* to the wider community surrounding the ECEC centre (Clark,
2005; Council of Europe, 2020; Formosinho and Figueiredo, 2014; Shier, 2001).
The following example refers to giving children the opportunity to *influence*
the choice of play materials:

> ... Children also have an influence on the choice of toys that are bought
> to the kindergarten. Before shopping, we show them catalogues, we talk
> about their needs.
>
> ECEC Teacher, Poland

Children can also *influence* the activities or projects taking place in the ECEC
classroom or within the ECEC centre:

> ... I had a child that one day told us, 'I want to be a poet and I write poetry'.
> And we invited her to say a poem. And then, most of the children wanted
> to say poems. And we decided to work on poetry. And from their sugges-
> tions, those poems focused on feelings. And we did a whole project about
> poetry and emotions, according to their ideas.
>
> ECEC Assistant, Greece

In addition, children's *influence* must be planned and organised, with children having their views considered from the beginning of the decision-making process (Council of Europe, 2020). Children may exert *influence*, for example, by analysing a situation, defining priorities, or planning an activity, as illustrated in the next example:

> Children could participate in the design of their playground. They could also participate in the vegetable garden project. First, children tasted different vegetables in the classroom. Then, they decided together, which vegetables they were going to plant. Finally, children were also given the responsibility to conduct the plans, for example by composing a purchases list and go shopping.
> ECEC Coordinator, Belgium

Planning and organising children's *influence* involves attention towards other elements, namely *space*, *voice*, and *audience*. Further, opportunities to *influence* decisions must be relevant for children, and professionals play an important role in supporting children in implementing decisions. The example that follows illustrates an opportunity for children to plan, decide, and carry out an activity they planned, according to their skills and preferences:

> ... I call myself a cooking teacher. I often cook in the classroom. Every year I make a Christmas dinner with my toddlers. I always make soup, main course, and desert. The students make everything themselves. They also always decide for themselves what to eat. The entire class must agree, and they must also do their own shopping. ... The students may look in cookbooks and they look in the magazine ..., they can rip out recipes they like. The children cannot read, so they mainly look at the pictures ...
> ECEC Teacher, Belgium

Importantly, children's *influence* in ECEC can be experienced at different levels, from consultation to child-initiation (Council of Europe, 2020; Hart, 1992; Shier, 2001). Consultation refers to receiving children's inputs (e.g., preferences, views) and making sure children understand the aims, the process or the results of a certain activity or project (e.g., which activity to do, which book to read, which materials to buy), though the final decision may pertain to the ECEC professional(s). Collaboration involves negotiating with children, in the different stages of the decision-making process, and sharing power and decisions (e.g., voting on which project to develop, establishing or negotiating

classroom rules). Child-initiation means encouraging children to make auton-
omous proposals and to initiate activities or projects (e.g., to create a new
play corner or to suggest writing poetry in the ECEC classroom). This requires
that children are able to identify opportunities to participate and influence
decision-making processes – for example, opportunities to identify situations
meaningful to them, to identify responsible adults, and to ask them the ques-
tions they find relevant. In the following example, an ECEC professional high-
lights the definition of rules by children.

> ... From the beginning of the year I tell them that this is their classroom
> and we are going to decorate it the way they want. It is their classroom,
> I will not put anything on the walls unless they want it. The same for the
> rules. They are going to make the rules according to the situations that
> they are going to face. I am there just to remind the rules, not to set the
> rules. This is their job and to follow them.
>   ECEC Coordinator, Greece

Monitoring children's *influence* in ECEC can be ensured through interviews,
group discussions with children and ECEC professionals, documentation
practices, observation, etc. (Council of Europe, 2020; Lansdown and O'Kane,
2014). It is relevant to monitor the scope, the quality and the outcomes of chil-
dren's *influence*. The scope refers to what type of decisions children *influence*,
which children exert *influence*, and when. Monitoring the quality has to do
with the extent to which children's *influence* is voluntary, and to what extent
there is intentionality, by ECEC professionals, in supporting children's *influ-
ence*. Monitoring the outcomes may be relevant to assess what are the conse-
quences for children and for ECEC professionals, and to what extent are those
consequences meaningful, sustained and disseminated.

    Likewise, it becomes relevant to monitor at what level are ECEC profession-
als promoting children's participation in decision-making. Debates between
ECEC professionals and children, about possible consequences of including
their suggestions in decisions affecting themselves, the ECEC classroom/cen-
tre or the local community, may be fruitful. Above all, promoting children's
influence in ECEC requires a participated and shared process among children,
professionals and the diverse stakeholders involved, in all stages of the deci-
sion-making process – from planning to implementing a project or activity
(Pinto *et al.*, 2020):

> For example, I work in the same building where the school is located, so
> the students come to our performances, but also representatives of the

> municipality and employees of the institutions with which we cooperate such as the local library.
>
> ECEC Teacher, Poland

Finally, an important aspect associated with children's *influence* in ECEC is the provision of feedback, namely feedback regarding how their views have been interpreted and used, how they have influenced any decisions, or how they will have the opportunity to be involved in follow-up activities in the ECEC classroom/centre. Moreover, constant reflection about pedagogical practices is recommended, among ECEC professionals (e.g., how children were listened to, what were the implications of certain decisions), as well as sharing, with children, possible constraints to the consideration of their views (e.g., budget limitations) (Clark, 2005; Council of Europe, 2020). Regular, timely, specific and clear feedback (formal or informal, individual or in group) is an important feature of effective communication, essential for both children and ECEC staff. On the contrary, lack of feedback may result in unwillingness to participate and exert *influence* in the future (Council of Europe, 2020).

The promotion of children's *influence* benefits from collaboration, joint reflection and shared efforts among all ECEC professionals (e.g., teachers, assistants, coordinators) and the wider community (e.g., children's families). The following example illustrates children's influencing the ECEC centre's menus, within a contest involving children's families:

> Our menu has been changed. There was a contest organized in the setting for parents and children, who wrote their ideas for recipes. Then, there was a raffle and some of the recipes were added to the kindergarten menu.
>
> ECEC Teacher, Poland

Simultaneously, shared discussions may help reflect on whether ECEC professionals are making the necessary efforts to include children's perspectives in decisions and planning within the classroom, centre or the local community (e.g., involving children's families, key professionals from the community):

> In our kindergarten, there is a whole set of documents which were prepared by the former director. ... It was, among other things, about understanding the topic of cooperation with parents, with different types of parents and different types of children; it generally helps to be open to the participation of all members of such a community.
>
> ECEC Teacher, Poland

The steps involved in the application of the Lundy model of participation to the ECEC context, considering its four elements and the organisational and contextual support needed to enhance children's participation, are systematised in Table 1.

Element	Aim	Application to the ECEC context
Space	*Promoting a positive space for child participation, at the social and physical level*	– Promoting a positive social *space* in the ECEC classroom/centre – Improving the physical *space* in the ECEC classroom/centre – Promoting a participatory *space* for all members of the centre and the community.
Voice	*Ensuring the expression of children's views in meaningful and relevant ways, with appropriate information, and through capacity building*	– Respecting children's competence, dignity, and responsibility – Providing information in developmentally appropriate ways – Identifying relevant topics for children to become involved in – Facilitating multiple forms of expressing children's views – Building children's capacity to express views, interests, and preferences.
Audience	*Ensuring children's views are listened to and given due weight, by someone with responsibility to listen to them and take them seriously*	– Providing children with the opportunity to have an *audience* or someone to whom they can communicate their views

TABLE 1   The Lundy model applied to the ECEC context (*cont.*)

Element	Aim	Application to the ECEC context
Influence	*Ensuring children's views are acted upon, when appropriate, and embedded within decision-making, allowing children to exert influence*	– Ensuring there is a process for listening and considering children's views. – Assuring children's views are acted upon, as appropriate – Ensuring children's *influence* is planned and organised – Providing multiple levels of *influence* – Monitoring children's *influence* – Providing children with feedback.

Organisational/contextual support for participation: ECEC professionals, families, and the local community support children's participation and optimise participation practices in close collaboration.

4   Conclusion

This paper aimed to illustrate the implementation of the Lundy model of participation within ECEC settings, drawing the attention of ECEC professionals and other relevant stakeholders to how the model can be used in this very specific field. For this purpose, we provided examples illustrating each of the elements originally described in the model – *space*, *voice*, *audience* and *influence*, while also expanding their definition and understanding, and enlightening positive practices described and implemented by ECEC professionals from Belgium, Greece, Poland and Portugal.

The interrelatedness of the four elements of the Lundy model is acknowledged by the author (Lundy, 2007). More specifically, Lundy recognised overlaps between *space* and *voice*, and between *audience* and *influence*. We argue, however, that there is additional overlap among the four elements. For example, there are intersections between *voice* and *audience* (e.g., the provision of a receptive *audience* requires ensuring the expression of children's *voice*), and between *influence* and *space* (e.g., ensuring children's *influence* implies the

promotion of a positive *space*). In addition, the promotion of children's effective and meaningful participation requires all elements, cumulatively.

Notably, we highlight the much needed organisational and contextual support for all elements of children's participation. In fact, considering that participation takes place in the context of the multiple interactions that occur in ECEC, the promotion of child participation requires joint actions and close collaboration among ECEC professionals, families and stakeholders from the community. This is consistent with research suggesting that both individual and contextual efforts are crucial to promote meaningful and effective participation (Samuelsson *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, multilevel and cooperative approaches are fundamental to support children's right to participate in ECEC. These approaches are consistent with European directives on children's rights, and more specifically on children's participation rights (European Commission, 2021).

Our reflection, informed by ECEC professionals' testimonies, also highlights the importance of conceptualising children's participation in ECEC as a multidimensional construct (Vieira, 2017). In fact, previous research has suggested that child participation, particularly in ECEC, constitutes a complex, multilayered process (Herbots and Put, 2015). Consequently, the distinct but interrelated elements examined in this paper, already present in the discourses of some ECEC professionals, provide important clues for the promotion of child participation and require careful consideration in ECEC practice.

A limitation of this work relies on the fact that the illustrations of the four elements of the model in ECEC were based on the perspectives and practices reported by ECEC professionals alone and did not consider children's contributions or the input of other stakeholders such as families. Therefore, we grounded our work on a model anchored in a legal perspective and adopted an adult-centric approach. This was a much-needed attempt to apply a well-recognised model of participation to ECEC, expanding current understanding on how to support children's participation in ECEC settings, as this right is not yet fully recognised, investigated, nor implemented in ECEC (Correia *et al.*, 2021). Nonetheless, it is of great importance to go beyond adults' perspectives. To our knowledge, research has not yet addressed young people's perspectives regarding each of the elements proposed by the Lundy model of participation. In this regard, a possible avenue for future research will be to include children as informants, to document their perspectives and participation experiences, considering each of the four elements – for example, what can be the best ways to support child-led initiatives and participation in decision making.

Given the complexity of children's participation in ECEC, we acknowledge that using a single framework may be reductionist (Herbots and Put, 2015). Nevertheless, we relied on the Lundy model of participation, considering that its four elements can be helpful to guide ECEC professionals in supporting young children's participation in multiple ways. The Lundy model is broadly recognised as instrumental within practice and professional development approaches on children's participation (Redmond *et al.*, 2015). Even so, initiatives integrating the use of other models (e.g., children's rights education models), instruments (e.g., self-assessment tools), and initiatives (e.g., incorporation of participation rights' standards into national legislation and curricula) may be needed to push forward the promotion of children's participation in ECEC (Jerome *et al.*, 2015).

Participation is commonly described as children's right to be heard and to have their perspectives considered. However, the possibility of making choices and influencing decision making is an important feature of children's participation, and one that is incorporated in the Lundy model (2007). Above all, considering the extent to which children are given the possibility to make choices and to participate in decisions pertaining to them, and the extent to which they are adequately supported and informed, receive appropriate feedback, and become aware of the impact of their decisions, adds complexity to child participation in ECEC. Such complexity requires combined efforts, at multiple levels of the ECEC setting, to support children's participation and empower children to become active agents in their education and beyond.

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