Revista Românească pentru Educație Multidimensională
ISSN: 2066-7329 | e-ISSN: 2067-9270
Covered in: Web of Science (WOS); EBSCO; ERIH+; Google Scholar; Index Copernicus; Ideas RePeC; Econpapers; Socionet; CEEOL; Ulrich ProQuest; Cabell, Journalseek; Scipio; Philpapers; SHERPA/RoMEO repositories; KVK; WorldCat; CrossRef; CrossCheck

2024, Volume 16, Issue 2, pages: 497-514 | https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/16.2/868
Submitted: February 22nd, 2024 | *Accepted for publication:* February 28th, 2024

Social Constructionism in the Educational System. New Dimensions regarding School Participation

Alexandra DAMASCHIN [1]

[1] "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi, Department of Sociology, Social Work and Human Resources, alexandra.galbin@gmail.com

Abstract: *This article is an invitation for social constructionist practices in the educational system to enhance school participation. The paper represents a qualitative research, and it explores the perspectives of children that are learning in rural areas. Fifteen in-depth interviews and three focus groups with children were conducted between April and December 2020. In this research is used a constructionist approach that finds participation as a social construction. In this line, school participation is created at the level of interactions between children, teachers, and parents through a continuous negotiation. The purpose of the research is not necessarily to highlight the practices through which children are involved as being appropriated or not, but rather to explore how children experience school participation, generating new practices to flourish school participation. The importance of this qualitative research is the fact that it includes the voice of the children that often is silenced in certain issues. Finally, the paper proposes a theoretical model addressing three different levels of school participation aim to generate solutions and new ideas for improving children's participation, considering their own perspectives.*

Keywords: *education; social constructionism; school participation; thrive.*

How to cite: Damaschin, A. (2024). Social constructionism in the educational system. New dimensions regarding school participation. *Revista Românească pentru Educație Multidimensională, 16*(2), 497-514. https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/16.2/868

©2024 Published by LUMEN Publishing. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Introduction

The paper is an invitation for social constructionist practices in the educational system and presents the children's meanings regarding school participation. The approach of the paper is based on social constructionism perspective that finds school participation as a social construction, generated by children's definitions which varies depending on the social, cultural, and economic context. The perspective emphasizes the importance of the relationships moving from individual process of education towards a relational one. Thus, school participation is created at the level of interactions between children, school, and family through intervals of negotiation. Children's realities appear as being in a permanent negotiation and are continuously assigned *in relation to* manifesting at the intersection between the ones experienced in the school, social and family environment. The purpose of the research isn't necessarily to highlight the practices through which children are involved as being appropriated or not, but rather to capture how children interpret and see school participation. This research focuses on children's voices as they are the experts of this subject. The paper uses the grounded theory strategy, analyzing fifteen in-depth interviews and three focus-groups with children, conducted between April and December 2020, face to face and online via Zoom platform. The exploratory dimension of the research is primarily due to the fact that too little is known about the extent to which the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic influenced children's participation (UNICEF, 2020), the research theme being a current one. The realities generated by Covid-19 pandemic changed the traditional way of children's participation. The online environment comes with a series of changes in perception in terms of children's relationship with school, and the lack of physical interactions appears as the first element that creates emotional imbalances among them. The results of the research combine certain elements concretized into a theoretical model which details school participation in three levels: vulnerable level, ordinary level, and extraordinary level. The paper proposes a theoretical model, that has the role to enhance school participation. The model could be a guideline and an intervention model for professionals to use and apply it in educational system, especially in vulnerable contexts, but not limited. The theoretical model promotes the inclusive education, the resilience, and the well-being of the children, as being key strategies to flourish children's lives. It is addressed to the school personnel, scholars, policymakers, and practitioners interested in school participation.

Social constructionism in education

The social constructionism brings a different perspective on how education is understood and seen. To appreciate these new directions in education, it is necessary to bring into discussion the social construction of knowledge. Unlike the constructionists, the constructivism is identified with the theories of Piaget & Inhelder (1969), Kelly (1955), and the place of construction is in the mind of the individual. The constructivism is very bound on psychology, and in terms of education the focus is on the child. On the other side, social constructionism sees the reality within the social process, and it doesn't focus on the individuals or on the school curriculum, but it is relational. In this way, the relational process is in the center of education effectiveness. Thus, the purpose and the practices met in education depend a lot on how we conceptualize knowledge, a very important aspect that each child should know (Gergen, 2015). A common definition of knowledge is found in the "justified and true beliefs". Certain researchers, scholars, establish in different fields what is good or bad, what is true or false. Hence, the curriculum and children's books are made to spread the truth (Gergen, 2015). Also, the process of knowledge about the world helps people to develop skills and contribute to their flourish. Therefore, the education is constructed to share with society the best knowledge (Gergen, 2009). Unfortunately, lots of experiences about schools send more to the negative part of it, anxiety, competition, fear, fear of failure, excessive boredom. These experiences are present in most of the educational systems. Education should help children to replace the common thoughts with solid facts and logical reasons. Instead, the experts determine what curriculum should children learn, what is good or bad, even if the voices of the children are completely missing. Also, in many cases children are punished for the evaluation results, either by the family, school or they are bullied by their colleagues. Children have disciplines that have a little interest on them, and they are evaluated by their abilities to repeat what teachers are saying (Gergen, 2009). The motivation is very low, and the creativity is stifled. Finally, teachers are also influenced by these practices. When you are teaching a standardized curriculum, you have all the chances to lose your motivation, enthusiasm, and the odds to create educational experiences are minimal (Gergen, 2015). The traditional education concentrates on communicate information, to fill the "mind" of the individuals, and the place of relationship is almost missing. The education is focused extremely little on constructing relationships. Students are learning by themselves, they are developing projects alone, they are tested individually. From constructionist perspectives, these facts are ironic, since the knowledge takes

place within a relational process (Gergen, 2015). At the same time, labor market is concentrated on collaboration. A constructionist view allows us to appreciate different types of knowledge: empirical knowledge, intuitive knowledge, practical knowledge, spiritual, visual, musical, and tacit knowledge (Gergen, 2009; Dragonas et al., 2015).

Social constructionism states the fact that there is not a universal knowledge, so following a traditional curriculum doesn't guarantee a more effective life. Many forms of knowledge are missing from the curriculum, for example how to continue your life after studies, how to deal with failure, how to sustain a demonstration (Gergen, 2015). Social constructionism is an alternative approach of traditional education, the focus is on collaboration, and not on individual knowledge. The concern is on the qualitative relationships between pupils and teachers, essential is what is happening inside classes. The question is how could children become participants in this process, in an efficient way? On the long-term classes should focus more on the relationships between teachers and pupils. The relationship between classes and environment should also be extended from a local level to a global one. From Gergen's perspective (2015) the participatory focus in education is vital for the whole society. The technology allows us to be connected, to be near people from different cultures, that have different purposes and objectives. There is a constant need for collaborations, to work in teams, to be able to negotiate. The research is developed in teams, so teams are vital for the function of organizations. Hence, the education focused on individual isn't sustainable, we need a different and more practical style of education, centered on relationships (Gergen, 2015; Dragonas et al., 2015). The following assumptions promoted by social constructionism offer us a way to rethink the traditional education and to make room for new practices and new possibilities (Gergen, 2009; 2015):

From fundamental knowledge to pragmatic and contextual knowledge

In the social constructionism vision, knowledge claims specific problems of particular groups. Answers in the educational system cannot be given in universal terms of knowledge. In curriculum should be questions as *what is allowed to put in practice*? *Why is it necessary and for whom*? These are questions that social constructionism claims in the process of education (Dragonas et al., 2015).

From neutral value of knowledge to critical and appreciative sensitivity

The problems claimed by social constructionism are considering the implicit values. Any form of knowing how is preceded by the inherent values of the lifestyle. In this context, the constructionist dialogues invite practices and the educational policies to be sensitive to the hidden curriculum, to the

untold values or sometimes taken for granted. The invitation is to an orientation that allows an analysis of implicit values and their incidence (Gergen, 2015).

From knowledge as representation to knowledge as action

The constructionists are critical about the theory of language. In education we can affirm that curriculum has limited utility. A good education doesn't reflect in what children are able to reproduce, but in what children are capable to do. Thus, the challenge for educational practices is to prepare children for a continuous innovation, children that are capable to create knowledge (Dragonas et al., 2015).

From individual approach of education to a relational one

In the traditional culture of education, the focus is to educate the individual. As a result, the educational practices concentrate on individual through homework, private readings, then children are evaluated according to the information they succeed to memorize. When we place the relational process in the first place, a huge change takes place. The question is how pedagogical practices can become participative, collaborative, and how these practices can explore alternatives regarding the children's evaluation. As Sirotnik (1983) says "we are learning the dependence on authority, on linear thinking, on social apathy and on passive implication". The focus on relational process has a significant influence on educational policies and practices. The emphasis on participative process has of course influence on teachers' competences, thus on the whole educational system (Gergen, 2015).

Research methodology

The paper explores the school participation from children's perspectives, based on the social constructionism paradigm. It presents the children's representations concerning the meanings of school, the impact of online school, and what are the recommendations of children and their dreams. The research is interested in identifying practices proposed by children that could contribute to increasing and improving school participation, following the next questions: *What are the children's meanings regarding school? What is the impact of online school on child participation? What practices can contribute to enhance school participation?* To this research took part 36 pupils from rural areas, children from primary, secondary, and high school, aged between 9 and 17 years old. During April and December 2020, fifteen in-depth interviews and three focus-groups were conducted with children from Iasi and Vaslui Counties. Children are coming from vulnerable contexts, with economic issues, being neglected or some of them having one or both parents working abroad. In total, five schools participated to this

research, three from Iasi County and two from Vaslui County. Eight schools were invited to this research, but because of the difficulties generated by the Covid-19 pandemic, only five schools accepted to participate. The interviews and the focus-groups were conducted face to face and online via Zoom platform, due to the restrictions generated by Covid-19 pandemic. The technique of drawing was used to facilitate the conversations, to create space for dialogues and to encourage children to express themselves. Children were invited to draw how they see school, and to explore any idea or feeling. This way of interacting with children contributed to a positive atmosphere, kept them attentive, and encourage the children to share their experiences. For analyzing and processing the data we used the grounded theory strategy. The main steps in defining the categories of this research were initial and focused coding, memo-writing, and the theoretical sampling. All the ethical aspects regarding the involvement of children in this research were considered (Graham et al., 2013). Children were very well informed about their participation and before the interviews and focus-groups they were encouraged to ask any question. The parents' consent was an essential condition, followed by children's agreement. Also, the children's teachers were informed by this research, facilitating the process of gathering data.

School participation as a social construction

Participation is a multifaceted concept. First, we should distinguish between participation as a social activity and participation as a power to influence or to create changes within social and political processes. Over time, Rampal (2008) affirms that child participation had various connotations. However, there is a common agreement that child participation is one of the fundamental rights of the children (UNICEF, 2006). Child participation means the engagement of children in decisions that affect their lives, community, but also the society (Brady, 2007). This fact implies to support children to develop their own opinions, to be capable to have their own thoughts, to express their voices in an efficient way. The voice and the capacity of children to think independently are two recent concepts embodied in the *new sociology* of childhood (Mayall, 2002). The *new sociology* of childhood sees children as being social actors that are involved in interactions with people or with the institutions (Alanen, 1997; Valentine, 1997). The voice of the children refers to the "intentions, hopes, grievances that children have and must protect them" (Pufall & Unsworth, 2004, p. 8). The capacity of children to think independently represents basically how children succeed to be heard.

Childhood is a social construction which varies in time and space, being a structural and cultural component of many societies (Twum-Danso, 2010). Sinclair (2004) suggests that participation means to protect children's rights, the adherence of children to equal responsibilities, to improve social services, to promote child protection and to empower children to develop their self-esteem and to become active citizens. Matthews (2003) brings into discussion three arguments considering child participation as: civil education, young integration, and the consolidation of young people in relation with adults, the main purpose being to improve children's lives. These facts refer to the guaranteed of such experiences so that children can afford to develop new abilities, to gain trust and to build social networks and relationships (O'Kane, 2003). Child participation requests a systematic and continuous support, emotional and intellectual resources, social and material structures capable to help children to be heard. In practice, very few children and young people have the abilities and the resources to influence the world around them (Sotkasiira et al., 2010). Including children in activities must have a tangible purpose, to lead to better decisions in order to reflect the true needs of the children. Children's perspectives are essential, and the implementation of children's involvement should be based on their opinions. The challenge is how child participation could be incorporated in organizational culture (Sinclair, 2004). Schools are responsible to involve children in decision-making. Participation in school context can take place in different ways as psychical presence, participation as verbal expression and discussions, participation as political representation, participation in decision-making, participation as involvement (Brito & Siveres, 2014). A participative school management should promote appropriate ways for children to get involved and to implement new ideas and projects considering the well-being of the children. The questions of this research highlight the perspectives of children, emphasizing the idea that the attention should be towards a system focused on children's values and capable to appreciate the children's role as active participants (Malone & Hartung, 2010).

School from children's perspectives

For the children involved in this research school represents a place for interaction and play, a place where children are making new friends. School is becoming the main source of knowledge, where children are spending the most of their time and get information. School is seen as a place for creating relationships, a place for socialization which contributes to the development of children's social and emotional skills. For many children,

school is also a place of refuge from their family problems. Thus, school becomes a chance for the future, a way to get rid of family stress and issues. For many children, school represents the second home, the only alternative that can change their life, and the friendship with their colleagues is a true support for some of them. The image below represents the main categories related to the meanings of school from children's perspectives.



Fig. no. 1 The children's meanings regarding school

Children see school as an opportunity to evolve, to obtain knowledge, in order to overcome their own conditions. Children learn skills and they act depending on what they see in adults, this fact having a significant impact on their development. Children claim that at school they are supported to face their family problems, and their friends are available to help them when they are in need. For most of the children school becomes a way to get rid from family context ("*I see school as a refuge. At school I found a refuge for facing the family problems, I found people, friends that are available to listen to me, to help me from their own initiative, to be near me…" Alexandra, 17 years old, Vaslui County).*

School is the place where children spend most of their time. The representations of children regarding school are closely related to the meaning of their family. The colleagues are seen as brothers and the teachers have the role of parents. Children understand the meaning of education, seen as the main source to succeed in life ("*For me school means the place where children spend most of the day, so it becomes my second home. I realized that my brothers are my colleagues, and teachers are our parents. The education will help us to succeed in life…" Cosmin, 10 years old, Vaslui County).* Children believe that school is a good way to fulfill their dreams. Children are aware of the role of the education, and they consider that by going to school they will have a better future ("*Don't miss the opportunity to go to school, through school you can accomplish all the objectives you aim for…" Gabriel, 12 years old, focus group, Iasi County).*

Impact of online school on children's well-being

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, school participation requests new ways of thinking. Online school empathizes even more the social inequalities generated by the family context. The living conditions, the access to resources, the involvement of the parents, and the local authorities' reactions represent essential factors which influence school participation. Planning a learning and a teaching process in uncertain times generate stress and anxiety to children. Facing this reality many teachers aren't prepared to deal with these challenges. It is very hard for the teachers to understand children's behavior because what happens behind the online platforms cannot be fully observed or known. The main problem however is the lack of devices for children and the poor infrastructure in rural areas *("For teachers is very hard to teach online lessons, they don't have materials and they can't understand what children are doing behind screens. Sometimes we don't have any signal, many children don't have devices, the participation is very low." Laura, 13 years old, Iasi County*).

The difficulties generated by Covid-19 pandemic deprive children first of all of their right to participate. Teaching online generates anxiety, fear, fatigue, and a lack of motivation amongst children. Most of the parents don't see online school as being efficient for their children and supporting them becomes their primary role. Not all parents have the emotional and physical availability to understand and help children. This fact has a lot of influence on children's attitude regarding online school ("*Our parents don't understand this new reality, they don't understand the technology, for us isn't so simple to stay all day in front of the screens. We aren't so motivated anymore, we are often tired", Ionela, 14 years old, Iasi County*; "*My parents told me that online school is for nothing, we need the support of our parents in this period", Petru, 12 years old, focus group, Iasi County).*

Participating in online school represents a real challenge in educating and engaging children and many good lessons can be learn for improving and creating a resilient system to respect the children's right to participation. The image below represents the categories related to the impact of online school on children's well-being.

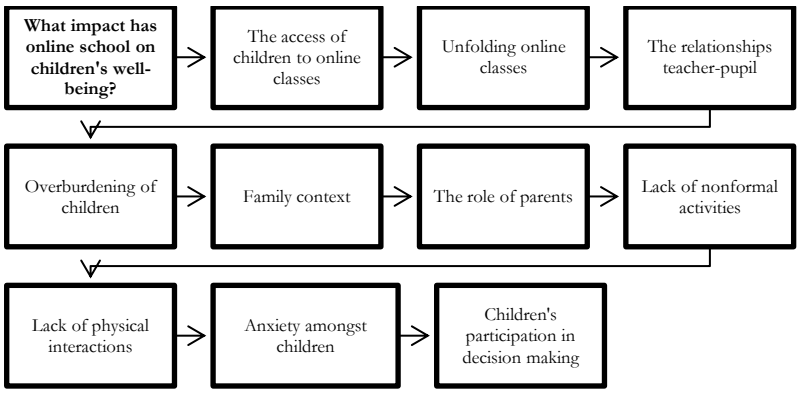
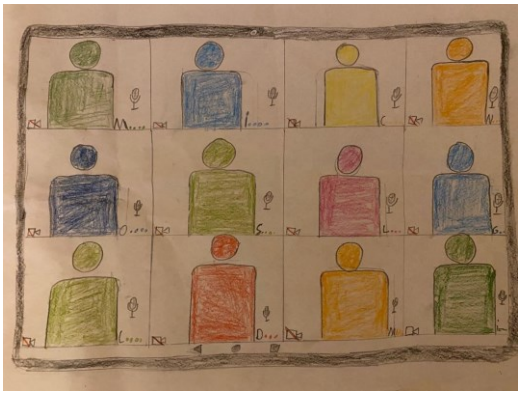


Fig. no. 2 Impact of online school on children's well-being

The lack of physical interactions affects children in a negative way. They are missing the school schedule and most of the time is spent inside their homes. In addition, this scarcity affects understanding the lessons taught, and children aren't capable to maintain their focus while taking online lessons. Spending too much time is front of electronic devices also affects children's health (*"Online school influence me more negatively then positively because I can't pay attention and I don't understand the lessons very well, I am always tired. I miss a lot the interactions with my colleagues, and also with the teachers. I miss having a program, to get out of the house…" Oana, 17 years old, Vaslui County).*

Distance learning for children isn't a process that guarantees equity among them. Pupils find online school difficult, as the distance doesn't allow them to interact, to see each other face to face. Spending too much time in front of the screen doesn't bring feelings of joy for children. Pupils that can't afford to attend to online classes are sometimes labeled by other children. Online school creates discrepancies between children that are able to participate and those who don't own adequate resources.



"*The draw represents the difficulty that we can't see each other face to face, we only stay in front of on screen. I don't feel very well to know that children don't have possibilities to participate. Even my brother has been in this situation until he got a tablet from school. Some colleagues called him lazy, but they didn't know that my brother didn't own a device ". Mihai, 12 years old, focus group, Iasi County*

Children are aware of the importance of safety measures, and the fact that they are able to learn from home keeps them safe from any risk. However, children prefer psychical school, because by going to school they can meet their friends. In this period, children miss their friends a lot, especially those who are in the last year of secondary school.



"We prefer psychical school; I miss my friends a lot. We only got one year left, and we will not be able to meet face to face again. I represented in this image the viruses as being angry, but they can't touch us. We are safe at home, but we are missing our friends", Alexandru, 14 years old, focus group, Iasi County.

Children's recommendations and dreams

The transition of classes in online context influences the interactions between children. Children feel the impossibility to play with their friends, they miss the school where they could have different activities. The narratives of children highlight the different perspectives that children use when they define school participation. Playing is the main instrument through which children can express themselves and harmoniously grow. Children's recommendations bring into discussion the collaborative practices (Gergen, 2015), practices that can lead to an inclusive education (UNICEF, 2020). The organization of practical and interactive activities are essential for children, and these should be integrated in curriculum. Children fell the need

to be encouraged and appreciated. They have big dreams, to be engaged into activities that promote justice, health, but also activities that encourage children to be heard. Children emphasize the importance of relationship, and they consider that school evaluation should focus on their abilities and not on memorizing the information taught by teachers (Gergen, 2015). The graphic below summarizes the categories related to the children's recommendations and dreams.

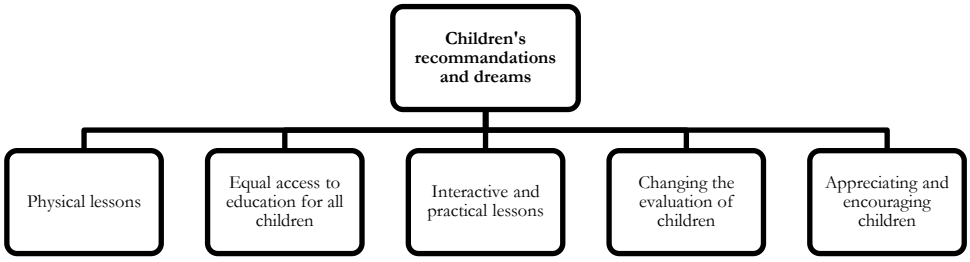


Fig. no. 3 Children's recommendations and dreams

The Covid-19 pandemic created a lot of uncertainties and confusion in children's life and emphasized even more the social inequalities. The representations of children underlined the need of children to express themselves, this practice missing from school culture. The lack of play and the psychical interactions unbalance the children and give them feelings of anxiety, and apathy towards educational requests. Children claim that online school was influenced by the main decision-makers, and their opinion wasn't considered. Children think that those who decide for other people should also be interested in their opinions and needs *("I think our opinions matter. Those who make important decisions should consult the others, to see their perspectives and needs. No one asked us how we feel and how we see online school" Ionela, 14 years old, focus group, Iasi County).* Children also see necessary an equal access to education for all children. All children should have adequate resources to participate, regardless their social or economic status *("I would like to offer the equal possibilities for all children. In this period a lot of children didn't get the possibility to participate in online classes, especially the children from rural area. Every child should be involved in activities, even if their parents don't have enough resources" Cosmin, 12 years old, focus group, Iasi County*).

A new model for enhancing school participation

School participation takes new meanings for children, and for a better understanding of how children experience participation we should examine and learn from children's experiences and realities. Child participation cannot be understood without considering the social, cultural, and economic context where participation occurs. The difficulties of developing school participation appear also from the narrow definitions of the concept, for instance *child voice* or involving the children in *decision making* (Lansdown, 2001). A boarder interpretation at all levels could create spaces for manifestation and for encouraging children to participate in decision making, in networking, in creating and developing the curriculum, important ways that characterize the practice of school participation. For those children who comes from families with a higher level of education or with a more open attitude regarding education, school participation offers new opportunities, but for those children that are coming from vulnerable families, school participation represents the only way through which children can have access to social and medical services or can have a hot meal during the day (UNICEF, 2020). Thus, participation is a way through which the needs of the children are fulfilled. The participation of children in difficulties times isn't just a right, but also a key strategy in transforming relationships with the adults, this being imperative in the context of the problems created by poverty and social inequalities (Ray, 2010). Children's participation can't be implemented without structural changes, and the perspectives of children must be part of these social and structural changes. The realities expressed by children send us to an inclusive education. Children are empathetic and they are aware of the importance of financial resources which limits the participation in an equal way for all children. Another important element is how children react in front of new challenges. Most of the children are using a negative language when they are talking about online school, and they are seeing the situations more from a deficiency perspective. This fact shows us that children are leaner towards seeing the negative situations, rather than the bright side of it, affecting their well-being.

School is for most children the main source of knowledge, but also of support and has a significant influence in their lives. In a society that continuously evolves, with new challenges and uncertain aspects, the capacity of children's resilience is essential. Children who have the capacity to manage better the new situations and more likely to see the positive parts, and to face better the challenges occurred. Based on these circumstances, the experiences shared by children empathize the next essential elements,

embodied into a theoretical model proposed for developing and encouraging school participation.

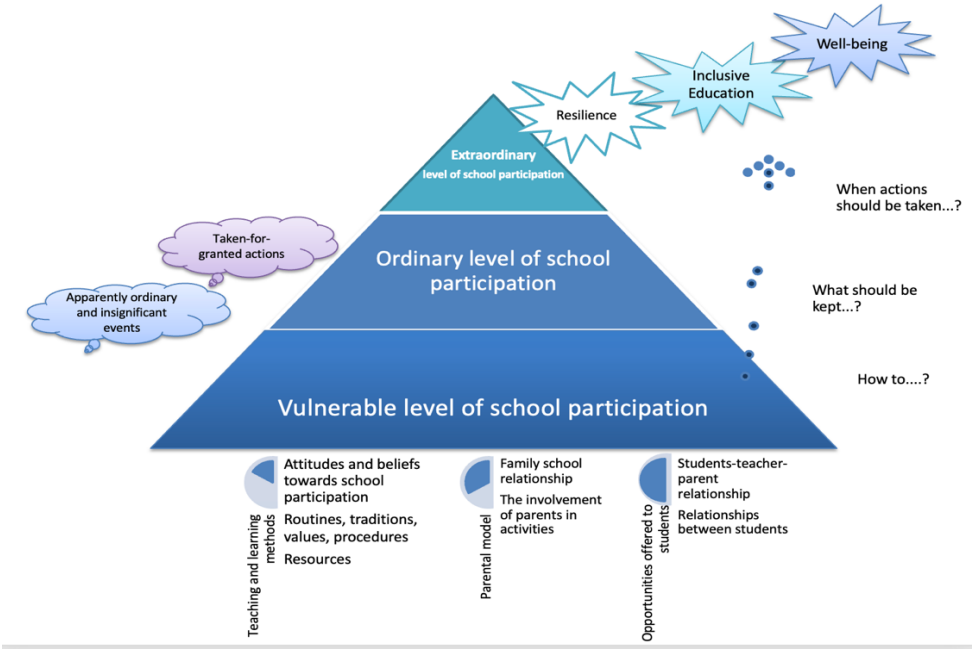


Fig. no.4 A new model for enhancing school participation. From Vulnerable to Extraordinary level of school participation (inspired by Cooperrider & Fry, 2020 , Levels of Appreciative Inquiry)

The new model for enhancing school participation promotes child participation as a way to develop more opportunities for children's involvement. As we already observed, children need both formal and informal settings in which everyone can express their own opinion, can be able to manifest their own personality, and can develop their own emotional and social skills. This involves building favorable environments at all levels, including family, school and community, environments that are able to sustain different forms for children's participation. For example, to create school programs through which both children and adults can be brought together in the process of learning and researching issues of mutual interest: equal opportunities, discrimination, teaching and learning practices, connections between students and teachers, or between pupils and pupils, the role of parents and their involvement. The model proposes is inspired by Cooperrider's work (2018) that "portrays three levels of *appreciative inquiry* from the least to the most profound, from the easiest levels to its more mature and more enactment" (Cooperrider & Fry, 2020, p. 268).

The vulnerable level of school participation takes into consideration the importance of creating a school culture based on respect, trust, mutual help between children, parents, and teachers, to create meaningful and equal opportunities for all children. This fact supposes first of at all to understand children's realities, to respect children's rights and to involve children in decision making. The ordinary level of school participation underlines the normal events apparently insignificant but very important, as psychical classes, the involvement of the teachers, events that at first glance doesn't seem important, but they are essential. This level brings into attention the awareness of appreciating each perspective and idea, and each actor involved in educational process. The extraordinary level of school participation gathers together all the elements mentioned and emphasizes a favorable framework for supporting school participation. This level empathizes three key concepts as resilience, the inclusive education, and the well-being of the children. School participation should encourage children to develop their resilience abilities, to offer equal opportunities for each child, and to implement activities that promote the well-being of the children at all levels, emotionally, socially, and mentally. The elements that the theoretical model combine brings in the first place the next questions: *How to*? *What should be kept*? *When is the right moment to act*? These questions have the role to generate solutions and ideas for children's participation, based on their perspectives. From children's representations we notice the fact that children need certainty and the adults, being the main decision-makers, have the full responsibility to act in an effective way in order to create from vulnerabilities, real opportunities that lead to a quality inclusive education (UNICEF, 2020), to resilience skills (Hunter, 2001) and the ensure children's well-being (Seligman, 2011; Bălțățescu & Bacter, 2016).

Conclusions and practical implications

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of importance of school participation and emphasizes the role of children in decision-making. Children's perspectives carry a little weight and are almost insignificant in proposing social policies, and most theories aiming children's well-being are based on perspectives of adults. Appreciating children's perspectives can create the appropriate space to rethink school participation. The new realities generated by the Covid-19 pandemic highlight even more the problems already known, but often being ignored. The educational system is fragile, vulnerable, with many gaps, and it doesn't offer equal opportunities for all children. The problems that appear in children's lives can't be solved outside the children's perspectives. The anxiety of children and the lack of

psychical interactions influence children's motivation to participate. The parents aren't always available to help, or they don't have the necessary resources to get involved. In many cases, the poor investment in education is the main barrier which stagnates the children's participation. On long term, these facts lead to social exclusion, to discrimination, school dropout, truancy, or school deviance. The theoretical model proposed in this research aims to promote school participation as a key strategy for children's well-being. Analyzing the vulnerabilities from educational system is a good opportunity to create sustainable mechanisms for respecting and promoting children's rights in all aspects that affect their lives.

Limits and further directions

The representations of children from rural areas underline only a few segments of realities generated by the Covid-19 pandemic, but the very valuable ones to be learnt from children's perspectives. The experiences of children bring into discussion the role parents and teachers, essential actors in the educational process. Including parents and teachers in further research is necessary to a more deeply understanding of child participation. Also, extending the diversity of participants could represent an advantage in knowing the consequences of online school, for example including children from urban areas. As we observed the Covid-19 pandemic has a large impact, including different factors and generates new research themes. Children are spending the most of their time at home, in the family environment, and what happens outside the school setting, how children are spending time on social media are interesting issues to be considered alongside cyberbullying, anxiety, neglect, or child abuse.

References

Alanen, L. (1997). 'Review: Children' childhoods and kinder und kindheit', *Childhood*, 4: 251-256.

Bălţăţescu, S. & Bacter, C. (2016). *Bunăstarea văzută prin ochii copiilor români: rezultatele studiului internațional „Lumea copiilor" (ISCWeB)*. Presa Universitară Clujeană.

Brady, B. (2007). Developing children's participation: Lessons from a participatory IT project. *Children & Society, 21*(1) 31-41, doi: 10.1111/j.1099-0860.2006.00024.x

Cooperrider, D. & Fry, R. (2020). Appreciative inquiry in a pandemic: An improbable pairing*, The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 56*(3), pp. 266-271, Sage.

Cooperrider, D. L. (2018). Appreciative resilience. In J. McArthur-Blair & J. Cockell (Eds.), *Building resilience with appreciative inquiry: A leadership journey through hope, despair, and forgiveness* (pp. 3-15). Berrett-Koehler.

de Oliveira Brito, R., & Síveres, L. (2014). The characteristics of participation of the school community in a shared management model. *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, *3*(3), 121-121. https://doi.org/10.14207/ejsd.2014.v3n3p121

Dragonas, T., Gergen, K. J., McNamee, S., & Tseliou E. (Eds.). (2015). *Education as social construction. Contributions to theory, research and practice*. Taos Institute Publications.

Gergen, K. J. (2009). *An invitation to social construction* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Gergen, K. J. (2015). *An invitation to social construction* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Graham, A. P., Powell, M. A., Anderson, D., Fitzgerald, R., & Taylor, N. (2013). *Ethical research involving children*. (1 ed.) UNICEF Office of Research Innocenti.

Hunter, A. J. (2001). What is resilience? *Contemporary Psychology: APA Review of Books*, *46*(4), 420–422.

Kelly, G. (1955). *The psychology of personal constructs*. Routledge.

Lansdown, G. (2001). *Promoting children's participation in democratic decision making*. UNICEF.

Malone, K., & Hartung, C. (2010). Challenges of participatory practice with children, in In B., Percy-Smith & N. Thomas (Eds.), *A handbook of children and young people's participation. Perspectives from theory and practice*, pp 24-38. Routledge. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.03.030

Matthews, H. (2003). Children and regeneration: Setting an agenda for community participation and integration. *Children & society*, *17*(4), 264-276. https://doi.org/10.1002/CHI.745

Mayall, B. (2002). *Towards sociology for childhood: Thinking from children's lives*. Open University Press.

O'Kane, C. (2003). *Children and young people as citizens, partners for social change, exploring concepts*. Save the Children South and Central Asia Region.

Piaget, J. & Inhelder, B. (1969). *The Psychology of the Child*. Basic Books.

Pufall, P., & Unsworth R. (2004). Introduction: The imperative and the process for rethinking childhood. In P. Pufall & R. Unsworth (Eds.), *Rethinking childhood* (pp. 1-21). Rutgers University Press.

Rampal, A. (2008). Scaffolded participation of children: perspectives from India. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, *16*(3), 313-325 https://doi.org/10.1163/157181808X311169

Ray, P. (2010). The participation of children living in the poorest and most difficult situations, in In B., Percy-Smith & N. Thomas (Eds.), *A handbook of children and young people's participation. Perspectives from theory and practice*, pp. 63-72, Routledge.

Seligman, M. (2011). *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being*. Penguin Group.

Sinclair, R. (2004). Participation in practice: Making it meaningful, effective and sustainable. *Children & society*, *18*(2), 106-118.https://doi.org/10.1002/chi.817

Sirotnik, K. (1983). What you see is what you get-consistency, persistency, and mediocrity in classrooms. *Harvard educational review*, *53*(1), 16-31. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.53.1.9645457u7030m285

Sotkasiira, T., Haikkola, L. & Horelli, L. (2010). Building towards effective participation. A learning-based network approach to youth participation. In B., Percy-Smith & N. Thomas (Eds.), *A handbook of children and young people's participation. Perspectives from theory and practice*, pp. 174-183. Routledge.

Twum-Danso, A. (2010). The construction of childhood and the socialization of children in Ghana, Implications for the implementation of Article 12 of the CRC, In B., Percy-Smith & N. Thomas (Eds.), *A handbook of children and young people's participation. Perspectives from theory and practice*, pp. 134-140, Routledge.

UNICEF, Regional Office for Europe, and Central Asia. (2020). *Creating resilient education systems in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic: Considerations for decision makers at the national, local and school levels*, https://www.unicef.org/romania/reports/building-resilient-education-systems-beyond-covid-19-pandemic, accessed on December 2023.

UNICEF. (2006). Day of General Discussion "to speak, participate and decide – the right of the child to be heard. Article 12: UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, *Committee on the Rights of the Child, Geneva,15 September 2006 – Opening Statement*. Retrieved from www.crin.org/docs/UNICEF-OpeningStatement-VK-14sep2006.doc on 2 March 2010.

Valentine, G. (1997). "Oh yes I can."" Oh no I can`t": Children and parents 'understanding of kids' competence to negotiate public space safety. *Antipode*, *29*(1), 65-89. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8330.00035