



# VOICE

Voicing children Opportunities Interaction  
Collective decision making Education

Avgitidou, S., Alexiou, V. & Lykomitrou, S. (2023). *VOICE workshop. Supporting Early Childhood Education Teachers to enhance children's participation.*

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## SUMMARY

The aim of this workshop is to provide teacher educators and researchers with a methodology for supporting early childhood education (ECE) teachers in enhancing children's participation in decision making about and during the educational process. Children's participation has been linked to children's rights (Lundy, 2007; UNCRC, 1989), the positioning of children as active agents (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; MacNaughton et al., 2008; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998) but also to constructivist theories of learning (Piaget, 1952; Vygotsky, 1978). It has also been linked to the quality of children's experience and democratic practices within ECE settings (Moss, 2021).

While both theoretical and research studies (Correia, Aguiar & Amaro, 2021; Lansdown, 2001; Shier, 2001; Treseder, 1997) as well as applied participatory programmes (Clark & Moss, 2011; Rinaldi, 1998) have long advocated the necessity and possibilities for children's participation, ECE teachers seem to provide limited scope for children's participation in ECE settings. This is explained due to teachers' dominant beliefs about children as lacking abilities (deficit model), their role as this of transmitter of knowledge but also their understanding of participation as mere response to teachers' guidance (Alexiou, 2018; Avgitidou, 2014; Bae, 2009; Lykomitrou, 2015; Sheridan & Pramling Samuelsson, 2001). Thus, research knowledge and applied participatory practices do not seem to have systematically affected ECE teachers' practice and more targeted teacher support is necessary.

This workshop therefore aims to provide a methodology for teacher support and relevant tools to teacher educators or researchers than can act as facilitators of teachers' professional learning. Teacher support is based on the principles of teachers as researchers and reflective practitioners (Cochran-Smith, 2009; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Specifically, professional learning can be enhanced when supporting teachers' critical awareness and transformation of practice through reflection, research of their own practice, theoretical grounding, dialogue and examples of alternative action (Avgitidou, 2019). This methodology will be used in this workshop as explained in more detail below.

Based on the above, educational material has been prepared within a program (VOICE) utilizing research about ECE teacher's beliefs and practices regarding children's participation but also results from action research projects aiming to transform teachers' beliefs and practices in action. Educational material includes theoretical, research and reflective tools to engage teachers actively in reconsidering and redesigning their practice towards a participatory paradigm of ECE. Part of this material will be used in the workshop and all activities will be based on collaborative teamwork.

The first activity of the workshop is based on a reflective tool that aims to highlight participants' various meanings of participation and foster discussions within and among the groups of their similarities and differences. Shier's (2001) model of participation is then presented and groups are asked to use it to locate their meanings and how they might relate to different levels of children's participation.



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The second activity questions participants' understanding of possible difficulties regarding the achievement of all children's participation in the educational process. The group is asked to rethink these "barriers" firstly by identifying who these difficulties may address as responsible for children's lack of participation. Then groups are handed with cards naming various preconditions for children's participation (i.e. knowledge of children, warm peer and teacher-child relationships, meaningful learning, opportunities for children's voices to be heard, flexible organization etc.) and based on the information of each card reflect upon their previous understanding of difficulties. Last, examples of research tools are given to groups of participants to reflect upon ways to learn more about children's opinions and actions as well as how teacher actions influence opportunities for children's participation.

The third activity uses short scenario and participants are encouraged to use the two prior activities to identify teacher's strategies in the scenario and possible alternative actions to foster children's participation.

Participants will be given time to discuss their experience in the workshop, make questions or/and give feedback to the workshop's methodology and tools used.

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