

CHILDREN'S POWER TO CHALLENGE AUTHORITY

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ABSTRACT: Child rights can be considered through the different characteristics of human rights, according to the classification “3P” as Protection, Provision, and Participation. The (potential) distinction between child rights and human rights recalls the former perspective about children’s not seen as human beings. The development of the fields on childhood studies such as “children’s participation” and “agency” are also related to the concept of “empowerment,” which indicates the power relations between children and grown-ups. The main purpose of this paper is to debate all those notions through the children’s own experiences by referring to various examples in the frame of Power of children as the Fourth-P right. After discussing how children have the power to “challenge the authority,” I will indicate some examples from *Little Review*, as a remarkable experience of children’s participation. Lastly, I will try to reveal what today’s children consider the topic of child rights by sharing the findings of pilot research with children, which I realized in 2019 December. In this study, twelve children who were 11-year-old then, wrote their commentaries about children’s rights and the requirements to have the rights. Thus, in the final part of this paper, the rights will be addressed through children’s perspectives.

Keywords: child rights, participation, children’s newspaper, children’s power, Janusz Korczak, childism

INTRODUCTION

In the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989), several statements are classified as participation rights, like the child's right to be heard (Article 12) or freedom of expression (13). Participation is assumed as one of the children's rights, whereas it is only mentioned five times as a word in the Convention; Article 9, Article 23, Article 31, and Article 40, respectively. Moreover, only the content of Article 31 is considered to be related to "participation" with its meaning. To clarify; Article 9 is about the child's right to live with parents, and Article 40 is about juvenile justice so that both of them can be classified as the principle of "protection," while Article 23 is about disabled children's right to enjoy and live with dignity, which is related to "provision." These three principles help us to classify and understand child rights easily. For instance, providing shelter, education or health are all included in "providing" as the main principle because they seem essential for living. On the other hand, "protection from neglect and exploitation" (Franklin 2002:19) is as important as "providing" something to them. Thus, these two principles are seen as fundamental rights. So, what about "participation;" is it already a right for children, or is it something grown-ups "provide" to them?

According to the 'Ladder of Participation' (Arnstein 1969), to reach the stages of participation, the levels of tokenism, where the steps of informing and consultation stand, must be passed over. Participation as the "fundamental right of citizenship" (Hart 1992: 5; Arnstein 1969). Suggests the ways to overcome tokenism to achieve citizen participation. (Hart 1992: 8). Reorganizes Arnstein's ladder for children's participation, and the first two stages before tokenism are manipulation and decoration there. Only after tokenism, which is quite similar to children's rights' staying as 'decoration' for politics, 'informed' and 'consulted' steps finally come. Participation can be realized after children being "consulted and informed" at the three last stages: "adult-initiated: shared decisions with children," "child-initiated and directed," and "child-initiated: shared decisions with adults." In contrast, indicating the developments of children's potential to participate in the decision-making process (Hart 1992: 5). It also addresses that participation itself is a "naive notion for children who do not have the decision-making power of adults." Thus, it is clear that children's participation 'rights' can not be discussed independently from power relations. In this paper, children's power to participate is reviewed through the 3P approach to children's rights based on the theoretical frame. In the following chapter, some methods of children's participation are indicated, for instance, Little Review as a prior experience for children's newspaper in the 1920s. Children's opinions about whether child rights are different from human rights and how child rights can be realized, will be shared to continue the debate through children's voices.

CHILDREN'S POWER TO PARTICIPATE AS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF CHILD RIGHTS

Wall (2010: 123) briefly explains the six participation rights as: "to be heard (article 12); to freedom of expression (13); to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

(14); to freedom of association and assembly (15); to privacy (16); and to access to appropriate information and mass media (17).” Article 16 and Article 17 seem as the requirements to participate to be classified as the other providing rights. In the Convention (UNCRC 1989), while Article 12, Article 13, Article 14, and Article 15 are directly about children’s agency and participation, ‘participation,’ as both a word and content, only exists in Article 31 as the right of play and leisure, which can be seen as ‘providing to’ children rather than ‘participating by them.’ It is indicated that the child has the right to participate in cultural life and artistic life, and every child needs equal opportunities. However, opportunities differ in real life, and distinctions deriving from social class cause children to participate at different levels unless they are completely excluded. (Franklin 2002: 26) indicates the possible reasons behind “children’s exclusion from decision-making,” such as “incapability of self-maintenance; self-sufficient,” not been able to take responsibility, and their “future-oriented concern.” Children’s exclusion from the decision-making is the ground for their being incapable or irresponsible in fact. Besides, the idea of the child’s having a lack of competence or responsibility is deriving from an adultist point of view.

Childhood studies recently have a brand new perspective against adult-centrism. For instance, (Wihstutz 2016) suggests “difference-centred approaches” based on Freire’s theory of “pedagogies of the oppressed.” The basic opinion here is children’s agency, which can be discussed through other concepts, like subjectivity and/or competency; as (Bollig & Kelle 2016: 37) claim, “the acting subject or the competent actor is replaced with a concept of participation in practices.” Based on children’s participation in practices, research with children, and participatory action research by children have become important topics in childhood studies. Wall (2019: 3) also addresses that “placing children at the centre of research” would provide not only “children’s agency and experiences in their own right, but also to develop critical understandings of child-adult relations and social practices.” He used the concept of *childism* “in analogy to concepts such as feminism, womanism, postgenderism, postcolonialism, decolonialism, environmentalism, and transhumanism” by suggesting it as an analytical tool for critical studies and even for the activist movement. While explaining the suggestion of *childism* as an analogy of feminism for childhood studies, he (Wall 2019) underlines the similarities between Spivak’s “subaltern” and feminism through the necessity of subjectivity, and to hear the unheard voices, just like children’s.

As a result, not only feminism or gender studies but also post-colonial approaches, queer and transgender perspectives can be included in those “difference-centred” fields. Childism can be understood through (Harding 1999). “Standpoint theory,” which has the potential to transform the subaltern into a competent subject for its own sake. According to their population, children have the characteristic of minority groups, just like women in the face of male-centrism or all people from peripheral places against several anglophone countries in the world. The debates on gender, class, ethnicity can be continued on that kind of distinctions, whereas, increasingly consensual value has become to respect differences, encountering the alter, et cetera. Moran-Ellis & Sünker (2013: 44) draw attention to the “competence gap,” which is not only an issue of the adult-children relationship, it seems more related to all types of differences

among human beings. Children's becoming empowered is so important that they are the future of society according to traditional discourse; on the other hand, children's participation is necessary for "socialization, adaptation to new conditions of the transition of the world" (Markowska 2018: 62) and it is the only visible way to take place in the decision-making process, and eventually to become competent.

Meacham (2004: 83) states some provisions to be able to participate, such as "self-reflection self-organization, behaving, interpreting," while Hartung (2017: 53) almost defines participation "as a way of 'empowering' or 'liberating' the subject." She also points out the increasing "value of personal freedom through self-realisation and self-determination" so that it seems like one needs to become empowered and achieve the freedom to participate, and one needs to participate to get the power and freedom simultaneously. Moreover, children's changing positioning in our world reveals the individualist and self-governmental discourses. Being productive and responsible is still required to become a reasonable citizen; besides, it is necessary to have universal humanistic values; children and young people's participation must reflect these thoughts. To provide children's active participation in society, the Gulbenkian foundation indicates that the governments should take responsibility and develop strategies (Freeman, Henderson & Kettle 1999: 43). By this means, participation can be long term, and children are exactly seen as citizens for today, not only for the future. Therefore, participation may become a fundamental right for children. According to Roche (2002: 72), children's rights are about "rethinking and redefining adult-child relations" that academics and researchers in the field of childhood have already considered the nature of rights.

Wall goes a step further through the "childist ethical grounding," he claims that human rights can only be expanded "the actual humanity of societies" through childism (Wall 2010: 113) because this critical perspective for childhood studies through children's standpoint can provide deconstruction of adulthood. If so, the actual humanity of human rights is only possible to take over the settled power relations. With a very critical review of the Convention, John (2003: 45) calls the fourth 'P' for children's autonomy: Power. Both children's becoming autonomous being and freely participating in the community they belong are considered to be integrated with empowerment; that's why it is quite remarkable to mention 'power' as a right of the child instead of power-relations or empowerment. Empowerment is an interesting word to be chosen, probably on purpose: its basic structure indicates the meaning: the prefix "em" means "to cause to be/to be in," while "ment" is corresponded with "an act or a result" (McCarthy, Holbrook & Freeman 2008; cited in Hartung 2017: 55), and Hartung defines empowerment as "an act of entering power into children and young people." Thus, the challenge is the act of carrying power from a powerful (adult) being to another vulnerable (child). Furthermore, adults, who provide children and young people "necessary skills, knowledge and inspiration to take control" (Hartung 2017: 55), are called "empowerer." The word's etymology clearly shows us the settled one-way directional relationship, based on the common hierarchical structure instead of reciprocal dialogue based on interaction and equity.

HOW TO HAVE THE POWER: JANUSZ KORCZAK AND CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

Although it is not simple to create an interactive relationship where equity exists, there are many experiences located in different places during modern times (since childhood perception used to be quite different in the pre-modern era, the period before the 20th century is another topic to discuss various childhood experiences). Janusz Korczak, whose consideration about children would become the main inspiration of the CRC, dedicated his life to children and their well-being in between two world wars. In addition to being one of the delegates for the Declaration of the Child's Rights in 1924, his perspective was much wider than that text: The Declaration only consisted of children's survival needs and their potentials. However, Korczak was aware of children's individuality from the beginning of his intellectual life so that he drew attention to the child's dignity and the right to be respected. On the one hand, he wrote novels for children and advice to teachers on education and caregivers about child-rearing as well; on the other hand, he built up a place for children, "Our Home" as a real home; "not a shelter, not a boarding house, it is a 'wychowawca' institution" (Vucic & Sekowska 2020:111), which means an institution of raising and educating.

In Korczak's approach to children and society, raising children or cultivating young people is not only preparing them for life, but the fundamental purpose is also to reorganize the society by creating the children's society according to the principles of "justice, brotherhood, equal rights and responsibilities." (Vucic and Sekowska 2020: 112) The orphan's home is a very outstanding experience owing to its main aim, and coming Korczak's pedagogical ideas and social perspectives to real life. Today, various methods are mentioned for children's participation (Freeman, Henderson & Kettle 1999: 62); such as conferences, survey and/or researches, focus group (with children), council, forum, newsletter (probably children themselves or with adult mentorship), and Korczak realized most of them at Our Home [Nasz Dom]. While playing games with children, he "could note the child's capabilities within the community, attitude towards others and motivations behind that attitude" (Vucic & Sekowska 2020: 100) states, which is a kind of participatory research in terms of childhood studies. Children had their court and council, so it was one of the greatest steps for children's agency and the power to make decisions. Children in Our Home could both consult their games unsupervised by adults; despite their differences, they "all involved in the collective activity" (Vucic & Sekowska 2020:100), and those experiences can still give a response to our continuous question that "which children" or "whose participation" (Markowska-Manista 2018) are we talking about.

In Our Home [Nasz Dom], there was no place for "philanthropy" and the children were not seen as "poor orphans," and that standpoint has always been the essential view: one ought to respect the child, not to pity them. It is also the widespread politics for our everyday lives against subalterns; that's why to have a voice is still significant to exist; your voice or another tool to express yourself is mandatory to survive. And the children who were the parts of both Orphans' Home [Dom Sierot] and Our Home had the chance to have a voice almost a century before. While "Our Home" was becom-

ing a prior example for a child council and an experiment for equal rights, *Little Review* [*Maly Przegląd*] as the supplement of Our Review, Jewish daily journal, appeared for children to be heard by more people. The experience of Little Review indicates two important distinctions between children: age and gender. Even they were both Jewish in Warsaw and probably had similar socio-economic conditions, “Korczak explained that adolescents had more opportunities to express themselves – they had books, discussion groups, and theatres, and were less controlled by adults, so did not have as great a need for the magazine as did the younger children,” states (Landau-Czajka 2019: 345). So, it was known that younger children needed a place to express themselves more. Korczak cared about younger children’s right of expression; besides that, two editors were invited from the first issue of the magazine in addition to Korczak himself.

Just before the first volume of the newspaper, in 1926, on the 7th of October, the announcement of Little Review was published by Janusz Korczak with the title, “To My Future Readers!” as a calling for children and school youth from the paper’s mouth. In that announcement, it is clearly stated that “There will be three editors. One old (bald, wearing glasses) to make sure everything stays in order. A young editor for the boys, and a girl – an editor for the girls,” which reflects Korczak’s fair approach and attempt to encourage all children to write both their ideas and observations, by continuing his words as “So that nobody’s ashamed and everyone speaks honestly and clearly what they need, what’s hurting them, what are their worries and cares” (*Little Review* announcement 192¹). Korczak’s well-known character, King Matt also discovers that he should not be embarrassed by someone’s laugh at him (Korczak 2005), so, Janusz Korczak tried to lead children to find out a strategy to overcome their vulnerability and to find the power themselves. To take a start, he suggested a permanent section called “I want to know” by making a mention at the end of the announcement so that it would be a start to give a voice to children and to awake their curiosity as well.

Since the first few volumes, *Little Review* realized children’s participation at almost the highest level of Hart’s ladder of participation (Hart 1992) because it was child-initiated despite Korczak. In the beginning, there was stated that “any fairy tales, fables, or novellas” cannot be included in the newspaper (Landau-Czajka 2019: 341), and in the first volume, the first part of a serial column, “An Orphan’s Diary” appeared by beginning with this statement that it was not a novel, it was a diary. However, in the following papers, children published poems and short stories as they had desired. Therefore, the experience of Little Review was adult-initiated in the very beginning, and then it rapidly changed into the way which children would like to write. The newspaper correspondents could even critique the newspaper, where they had a chance to have a word, itself. As Korczak promised, permanent correspondents had their desks, and they invited new correspondents to the place of Little Review. From readers who sent letters to the magazine to correspondents, from contributors to permanent contributors, Little Review was quite like a school for children to learn, express ideas, share their troubles and worries, ask for help, build up solidarity, and develop strategies to struggle.

¹ The volume in English is accessible via <https://labiennale.art.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/1-MP-1348-1926-ENG.pdf>

Sometimes, a correspondent addressed the big-scaled world issues, like “There is no solidarity. If it is, people would work together not to kill each other,” meanwhile, another wrote that “I don’t know what happens in the whole world because I’m too young, but I know very well what happens at school” (LR 1927, 10 June), thus, he revealed school issues and shared his everyday problems, which the others might find familiar. Children generally told their troubles, such as ‘boys’ harassment to girls’ that indicates gender issues, or “bad students” as a matter of bullying, which is still a great problem for children and teenagers. On the other hand, their everyday problems sometimes became an injustice matter: for example, a letter to the director of city transportation in Warsaw was published in the 53rd volume (LR 1927, 21 October), questioning why students in public schools ought to pay for transportation, while there was transportation card for the private school students, by declaring that “a great injustice has been done to public schools.” So, just as (Landau-Czajka 2019: 353) emphasizes “both in Korczak’s time and later,” the effect of Little Review was an opportunity “to challenge the authority of adults.” There were also commentaries that “Aunts and grandmothers hate the Little Review” in the newspaper because it must have been difficult for them to give ear to the ‘weak’ ones. Moran-Ellis & Sünker (2013:35) underline that intergenerational trust is important for children’s participation so that school councils may be helpful to children nowadays, from the milieu they attend to the city council where they keep living, participation can be expanded.

CHILD RIGHTS THROUGH CHILDREN’S EYES

My first ‘official’ encounter with children as a grown-up occurred in 2012 when I started to write novels for children. That time as a 23-year-old extremely young lady, I was feeling like one of them as if there was no hierarchy in our dialogue. However, our relationship could not be horizontal due to its nature: I have been the writer, who was invited there by teachers, the other grown-ups, and the children/students had to call me ‘siz’ [you as the plural pronoun and singular at formal communication, like ‘Sie’ in German] instead of ‘sen’ [singular version of ‘you’ pronoun]. In Turkish, younger kids call grown-ups ‘sen,’ but as soon as they come to the school-age, they learn to say ‘siz.’ Young people can call only their family members as ‘sen,’ besides that, if they talk with ‘sen’ pronoun to a foreigner, it is supposed that these children are too spoiled to respect anyone. Interestingly, I began to consider this nuance just after I tried to hear the children’s voices, trying to become a real equal one, not the writer, teacher, or academic. On the other hand, writing for children and researching with children both prompt me to look inside myself, my past, my childhood. I remember I was ‘that spoiled one,’ because I used to think that I was as a competent being as adults, I had rights and freedom. The point is that I never recognized myself as a child, just as Korczak (2009: 29) said: “Boys and girls don’t like to be called children.”

Through this perspective, it is apparent that a child must recognize him/herself as a human being at first rather than a child. If so, how do they perceive the distinction between human rights and child rights? To understand child rights through their eyes, I decided to conduct very small-sized research that I share its results in this chapter.

It was realised through participatory research methods, by which the children provided their experiences and opinions to express themselves during our investigations. I asked three simple questions to the volunteer 11-year-old students in a classroom, and twelve children shared their responses with me. The questions were respectively: “what are child rights? Do you think are human rights and child rights different? Are there any requirements for child rights?” For the ‘child rights’ section, almost all of them wrote “the right to live, shelter, food, etc.” the basic needs to survive. A few of them caught the nuance while starting, or noticed the focus of the second question that they mentioned “education, play, the right to enjoy, to express themselves/their ideas, etc.” At the first glance, the basic needs seem to belong to all human beings, but children may need something more. While writing, children talked among themselves, discussed with each other, and acknowledged several different statements, which I will tell by indicating the main points they mostly drew attention to. But before that, I would like to touch upon ‘which children’ I was together with, and ‘when’ we met.

We had come together several times since October 2019 for philosophy workshops, and I chose the main topic to start an argument, then mentored the discussion by children. By that time, our agenda was different, and then the school principal asked me to conduct a workshop about child rights because of *World Children’s Day* on the 20th of October. It is called *Child Rights’ Day* in Turkish since we have another children’s day on April 23, *National Sovereignty and Children’s Day*, which is a public holiday in Turkey to commemorate the foundation of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. Despite the relation between the council, where democracy would (ideally) be experienced, and the children, whom the others need to hear, is quite revolutionary, children’s participation during National Children’s Day cannot go beyond the level of tokenism. Children take the seats of the ministers or members of the parliaments for the day and declare their demands; however, everything has done a part of the ceremony. Unfortunately, children become a game for the serious politics of the adults’ world. Therefore, both National Children’s Day and World Children’s Day as ‘our’ day of Child Rights, which is also just before Human Rights’ Day on December 10, are seen crucial to discuss human rights and freedom with children and young people.

There is an increasing number of child rights’ activists in Istanbul. For instance, the editors of (Parlayan & *Çocuklar* 2018:18) interviewed children, living in Tarlabası district in Istanbul, where different ethnic groups of people, families having low socioeconomic backgrounds, and many refugees live, about child rights for World Children’s Day. Except “the right to live, shelter, and education,” which was also indicated by the other children from higher classes, whom I worked with, children from Tarlabası said that the child has the right to have a “homeland,” play in “clean streets,” to have “brothers and sisters.” Rather than a family, demanding to have siblings is probably deriving from cultural traditions. Desire to have a “homeland” must be due to being away from the homeland. Although not indicated in the magazine, it is possible to say that statement belongs to a refugee kid. The other children’s request of “playing in clean streets” shows us another problem: unequal conditions for different ethnic groups and potential discrimination children and young people have already face. That is why the question “which children (can) talk about children’s rights and partic-

ipation?” becomes more significant. For instance, child labour is still a drastic matter, and the ratio of seasonal agriculture child worker is high in Turkey. When we consider those children, even protection rights endanger.

Incidentally, I have been visiting various primary and secondary schools in different cities of Turkey for my sign days to meet and have conversations with children. As a result of this, I realized how children’s interest, interpretation, and expression differ due to their various experiences. Their awareness of the circumstances in the world is also quite different according to children’s tendencies and interests; that is why it is not possible to generalize awareness or knowledge of children about child rights. On the other hand, let me explain an observation about children’s participation experiences: some upper-class children may be interested in new childhood movements, like climate activism, naturalism, and so on. However, children from lower classes or children with another disadvantage due to ethnicity, residence, etc., usually have more chances to participate in various platforms in their neighbourhood, in the favour of child rights activists. As Hartung (2017:56) reminds that “There is also an assumption that the children and young people not only have the capacity to take control but the desire,” which I agree with. Perhaps, children with disadvantages need this ‘desire to take control,’ or ‘have the power’ to challenge the authority, which they would ever have, more than the others.

Although the magazine *Parlayan Çocuklar*² I mentioned above, is not completely written/produced by children (but they are the main contributors for sure), it is a remarkable platform for children to say their word. For example, a child’s letter to the president, asking for “peace” was published with the motto “no more violence in the country” (Parlayan & Çocuklar 2018:8). Another kid’s letter appealed to the minister of education, telling about the difficulty they had to access educational devices in the school. And the writer of that letter was also the delegate of his school, explaining that the school administrator had wanted money from the children’s parents but they could not afford it. The child could find a way to write a letter, whether it would work or not, he apparently found out how to struggle with difficulties using having the power from his position, by taking control –and responsibility as well- in the school council.

Whereas, to be a delegate in the school council does not seem as ‘cool’ as the other things in privileged schools so that upper-class children have a chance to be engaged in something else, except fighting for their rights. So, the children, who participated in the child rights workshop I mentored, were those kinds of kids. They have access to many cultural and artistic events, they can attend various activities in the city, and they experience childhood just like me. But they are different about the matter of awareness: they do know what child rights are, while I never cared about being a child. I am telling this by comparing my childhood experience to show how the perception of child rights changed. In recent years, the raising of civil society and volunteers

² For more information: <http://www.tarlabasi.org/yayinlar> There are many remarkable issues mentioned in the magazine *Parlayan Çocuklar* [Shining Children] for instance, “Violence Perspection of Children,” “Women Rights,” “School,” “Disabled Rights,” and “Environment Rights” are several titles of the volumes published so far.

working with children has raised the awareness of all children as far as I observed. Therefore, the students, who can go to prestigious colleges, private schools, and even middle-class children in general terms, have commenced knowing what the child officially means and what kind of rights children have. Regardless of age and gender differences, most of the children from the middle and upper classes have an idea about what child rights mean.

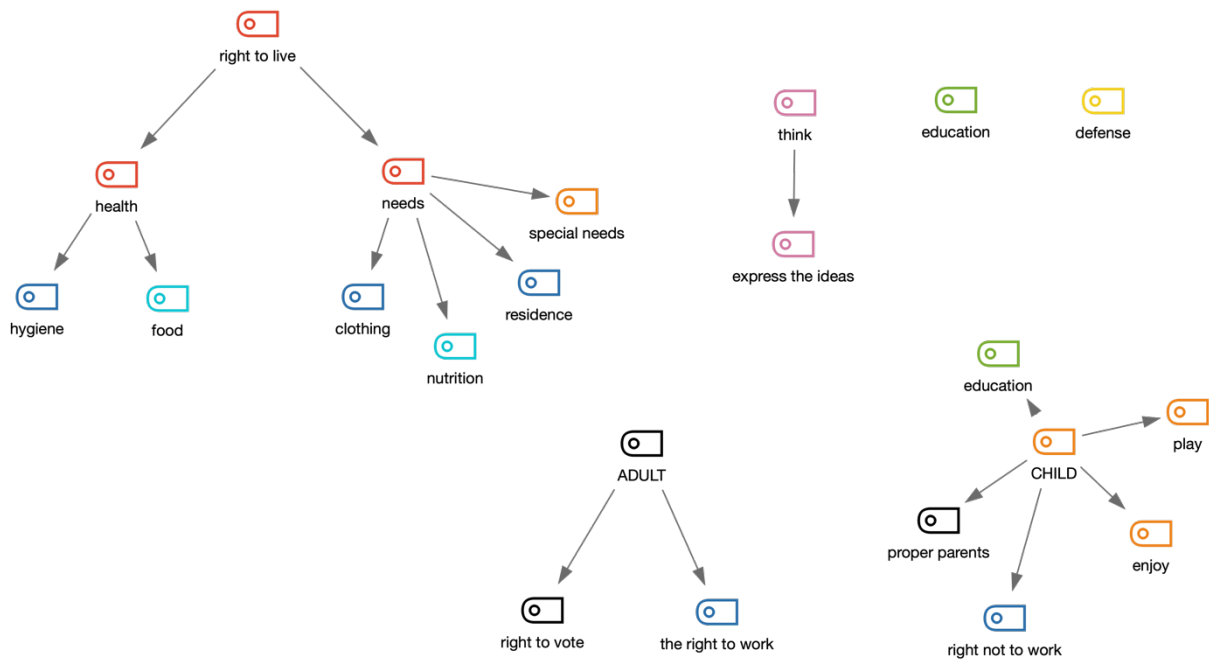
In my opinion, internet access and the usage of digital platforms of children have also impacted children's knowledge about those issues. On the other hand, children do not engage in politics unless they have specific problems, just like all other humans who have various ages. Thus, there are significant differences between people deriving from the cultural and social conditions they experience. While girls in Tarlabaşı or the other specific districts have trouble walking in the streets comfortably, the children I did this case study with have no problem due to gender differences. (Because most of them live in protected areas, like gated communities, they may have a lack of freedom to go outside as much as lower-class children. It is apparent that so many variables impact those differences among children's experiences, so I cannot achieve to address through this limited study.) Plus, I did not encounter any specific differences deriving from gender in our research. Those twelve children were five boys and seven girls, which I have chosen not to indicate while referring to their statements.

When we look at the responses of the children about the rights, we see that all of them mentioned "the right to live," as human rights or child rights, which is expected. As child rights, "education" comes after, children mostly indicated "education" or "the right to access education/to be educated" or "go to school" because it is the basic difference in comparison with human rights. In other respects, it is clear that they distinguish the fundamental rights as "sheltering/shelter/house," "eating/food/eating food/drinks," "clothing," "hygiene," and "health." Health mentioned only twice; whereas, if we remake the same brainstorming, the frequency of 'health' might increase due to coronavirus. "Hygiene" is stated as "to be clean" or "live in a clean area," in a more childish way, while most of them wrote "sheltering" instead of home/house. Two of them tried to mention other rights that are not as vital as "personal things" and "private needs." In addition to the vital rights, briefly "the right to live," and all the other common and private needs; "education," "play," and "enjoy" were the top three. Then, those came after according to the frequencies: "the right to think," "expressing the ideas," "defence," "proper parents/family." Finally, each of those was mentioned once: "freedom of expression," "the right not to work."

Although most of them dislike the school, all children in the classroom are aware of the positive sides of the school. It is apparent that they care about education as the fundamental right for child rights, and it is specifically for children; that's why children mostly must have claimed it. "The child is a rational being. He knows full well what his needs, difficulties, and obstacles in life are" (Korczak 2009: 34). Explains, thus, they are satisfied with the school, where they play and enjoy. Almost none of the children like school because of the lessons, after time passes, everybody remembers school time as the period of playing games and having fun with friends. School is important to socialize, to make friends, as a result of this fact, we are in trouble with

online education today, which is another subject to mention.³

For “the right to play,” children wrote different statements, such as “playing games,” “to play without ignoring homework,” and “to play until a specific age.” The second is an indicator that play and homework are just the opposite and that a child probably plays to escape homework, like many others. The last is interesting to refer to the temporary of childhood. Every child knows that they will grow up and become adults, whereas “to play until a specific age” means “not to play after this specific age.” Perhaps, it is a kind of fear of growing up, escaping from adulthood, the ‘boring’ world filled with responsibility and mandatory. Childhood is preferable for children themselves because they also know they have “the right to enjoy.”



Creative coding outline (via Maxqda) to show the relations of the rights. While adults distinct from children through “voting” and “working,” children specifically have the rights of “education, play, enjoy, having family, not working” that adults do not.

“The child knows nothing of the difficulties and complications of adult life, the sources of our excitement, disappointments, let-downs; what ruins our peace of mind and sours our humour; he knows nothing of adult reverses and losses.” (Korczak 2009: 25)

As Korczak said, children may not know anything about adult life, but they are aware of what they will encounter. They do not know “the difficulties and complications,” but they do know that the difficulties and complications exist for the adults waiting for today’s children. So, some of the children noted another right for the child: “the right not to work,” which is both understandable and true; it is understandable because the school distinct children’s world from adults, while adults’ world includes “working,” differently from children’s; and it is true because Article 32 (UNCRC 1989)

³ In the meantime, there is a children’s music band in Turkey, the most well-known song by them is called “Dersler çok uzun, teneffüsler çok kısa [the lessons are long, the breaks are short]” the video-clip is: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=529793170765416>

protects children from economic exploitation. Most of the children know that they can not be forced to work, and I think it is one of the best ways to adapt this information (with the statement of a child “Children don’t have to work!”) to a “right” is the invention of the statement as “the right not to...” which also contains Article 31, the right of leisure, play, free time.

Children already replied to the differences between child and human rights. However, when it transformed into a question referring to the potential child-human distinction, some of them gave some responses, like “There mustn’t be any difference between the child and human rights!” Except this, the children mostly indicated the specific characteristic of children; for example, the vulnerability was declared through various statements, such as “Children are not as smart and strong as grown-ups and, their psychologic characteristics are also weak;” “I think there is no mercy for adults, but for children.” Those two statements by two different children sound like reflections of the adult-centred society; children may not be as physically ‘strong’ as adults, but being smart should be another topic. Some of the children see themselves as ‘too childish’ to be smart. The second is true; people have mercy for children because of the same reason: their vulnerability, weakness as the first kid underlined. However, I am not sure that he noted this sentence through whether positive or negative aspects. The children in Our Home did not want to be seen as “poor orphans” declining people’s philanthropy. On the other hand, “having mercy/being merciful” is sometimes seen positively by people. Thus, it would be better to conduct new studies on this topic with discussions about different aspects of the others’ behaviour, adults’ attitudes against children, etc.

Furthermore, some children drew attention to the neglect. One said: “If we talk about the present, child rights are neglected much more.” One of the children tried to underline the significance of the child: “Child rights should be valid for children, to catch children’s interest, and to provide children’s need,” while another touched upon the subject by the definition of the child: “Child rights would end when one gets 18, but human rights stay with us forever.” These are understandable to distinguish ‘special’ child rights, whereas that child-human separation of one of the children is remarkable: “Human rights are not only for children; the rights are valid for every human being in the world.” That sentence reminds Wall’s claim that human rights “need to be fundamentally rethought in light of childhood” (Wall 2010: 113). The recent crisis about humanity can be overcome only through an alternative perspective from the subaltern or ‘the alter-subjects,’ whatever we call it. According to Wall, it is the perspective of childism so that he adds “Childhood must save human rights from itself.”

In the last part, only one child claimed that “Children don’t need anything else, they can already use the rights they have,” about “the requirements,” while they mostly focused on the issue of “support.” Half of the children directly wrote that children “need support” to “use the rights.” One said, “They can use their rights, but sometimes, it is necessary to have permission,” with the ‘permission’ word, she referred to a grown-up. Most of them indicated the adults themselves: by writing they would need “family,” “a good family,” “parenting,” “teacher,” “somebody to defend.” The ‘defence’ notion also seems interesting as it was declared by most of the children as the require-

ment to benefit from child rights. A kid wrote that “Children need someone to defend them in order to use their rights,” while another said, “Children should have the right [to consult] a lawyer for free.” The ‘defence’ issue is more than a requirement for child rights, I think most children meant self-protection; for example, one of the kids stated that “Children should learn emergency numbers.” It is apparent that children do not feel safe, instead, they mostly feel frustrated or neglected.

In addition to support, “knowledge” was written frequently: for example, “Children should know all the rights they have,” “They need to have the knowledge,” “Education is needed.” After knowledge, education/training was used in their sentences. Korczak said that the children need “a guide who will politely answer his questions” (2009: 35) by indicating both support and knowledge. They need “respect for the effort of learning!” As “a sizeable portion of the population, of the nation, residents, citizens – constant companions” (Korczak 2009:33), children are also aware of the relationship between rights and freedom. Some of the children wrote that they need the freedom to use the rights, one stated as “life that preserving freedom.” Moreover, a few of them indicated the official issues, such as “to have an identity,” “laws to protect them,” “council,” “consensus.” More childishly, two children wrote that “to use child rights, it is mandatory to be under 18!” and “to be a child.” In the end, one propounded an opposite idea: “Children do not need anything else, they can already use the rights they have,” which is true as well, at least, officially.

DISCUSSION: DO CHILDREN HAVE THE POWER TO SAVE HUMAN RIGHTS?

While analysing this little research, new questions have appeared in my mind. On the one hand, I tried to reconsider children’s present situation in comparison with the children who had the chance to attend the children’s council or to write for children’s newspaper; on the other hand, I attempted to match the children’s interpretations to the participation rights. Protection and providing, the first two P are more understandable and acceptable since they are based on adults’ point of view. It is simple to act adaptable to the settled authority. Whereas, participation is problematic due to its real meaning: children should become subjects to participate, while they usually cannot. As researchers and child rights activists from Turkey, we usually noticed that children’s participation was always discussed as a very serious issue by adults more than children, which means there were almost no children to participate. Children are also aware of this conflict that some of them criticise the ‘events’ on child rights, and in the last couple of years, we have begun to see more children expressing their ideas, talking about their problems at several panels and forums.

To conclude the pilot research by thirteen of us, me and the children, although we did not separate participation rights from the others, they realized that separation unconsciously: after indicating the “survival needs,” they mentioned “freedom of expression” (Article 13), “thought” (14), “access the knowledge” (17). Moreover, two children’s assessments about “council,” and “consensus” might become also related to “freedom of association” (15). As the fundamental participation right for me, “children’s voice to be heard and respected” (Article 12) was not declared clearly; however,

all the words they said were their attempt to be heard and respected for sure. Meanwhile, there is much news about children's reviews and critics about online education on various internet platforms and social media, nowadays, so that I find the ongoing situation is quite favourable for children's participation. Step by step, at first, creating a space for them to have a voice, then listen to them; we can eventually 'support' the children to become competent subjects.

Cassell (2004: 136) ended her paper about a children's forum with a commentary of one of the kids: [this project] "has made us feel more secure about ourselves" that recalls the 'empowerment' of the children with the statement to feel 'secure.' However, I prefer to consider through brand new conceptualizing to replace "awareness" with "empowerment" by respecting the children's desire to access knowledge and to build associations through the internet. Just like the section "I want to know," which Janusz Korczak suggested for the newspaper, children with curiosity and questioning the world have the power to change the world. In the end, turning back to the question inspired by Wall (2010) claim: Do children have the power to save human rights? It is hard to respond to it for now, but why not? I prefer keeping my childish hopefulness.

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