

Children's Rights and Early Years Provision in India

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Abstract

The term 'participation' is vague, and its meaning has been increasingly contested in early years education. This chapter analyses children's everyday experiences in a formal preschool setting in India, and offers a series of reflections on what such experiences mean for the concept of children's rights. Considering pedagogy as a contested terrain where different world-views, perspectives and power positions intersect, this chapter examines the power inherent in everyday interactions between children and teachers, and suggests that participation is an ongoing negotiated process. Whether children's rights to participate in early years provision are realised, depends on how they are positioned in everyday contexts. My research demonstrates the active agency of young children, suggests that young children have the ability to contribute to everyday pedagogy and practice, and that their participation is meaningful if it is rooted in their everyday lives. Children should be recognised as active players who can learn things in many ways and acquire knowledge through their embodied experiences.

Introduction

Over the last two or three decades, early years provision in India has gained widespread recognition among the public for two main reasons (Sultana, 2009; Viruru, 2001a). Firstly, because middle-class aspirations perceive its benefits and secondly, and in contrast, because the children's rights movement has promoted early years provision as a political act to attain young children's rights and well-being (Pattnaik, 1996; Sharma, Sen, & Gulati, 2008). Early years providers have begun to treat children as active human being, however, with a few exceptions (see for example, Viruru 2001a, 2001b), children's everyday practices are under-theorised in India. This chapter therefore focuses on children's everyday rights in early years provision, critically examining what children's everyday experiences mean for our concepts of children's rights and well-being. The chapter presents data from ethnographic fieldwork conducted with young children (aged five years), the chapter offers critical insights and a series of reflections on the pedagogical processes that enable/disable participation in everyday settings. The chapter analyses the idea of power vis-à-vis pedagogy, suggests that participation is an on-going negotiated process, and concludes that children's right to participate in early years provision depends on the position in which they are situated. The analysis demonstrates the active agency of young children and encourages the reader to recognise young children's ability to contribute to everyday pedagogy and practice.

Setting the context

According to a draft National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy (2012), early childhood in India is defined as the period between zero and six years of age, and the term early years provision combines two different aspects of children's lives: childcare and early childhood education. In the past, the family was predominantly the place where childcare was provided and where young children were educated. Care and education has now become increasingly institutionalised, due to a variety of factors including an increase in the numbers of women in the workforce, changing family structure and speedy economic growth. A diverse early care and education sector has emerged in India, with different types of provision ranging on a spectrum from solely providing childcare to solely being concerned

with pre-school education. In the centre of this spectrum are providers that offer an integrated service, combining care and education.

The early years market in India is largely unregulated. There is no formal qualification required for the early years workforce, and there seems to be a huge gulf in quality across different service providers (Prochner, 2002). While the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) and the education department (pre-primary wing) provides publicly funded services, mainly to children from less affluent families, a range of private providers offer early years care and education to different age groups in the market. Table 1 gives a snapshot of different types of service providers present in India. The table draws on Chopra (2012) and Kaul and Sankar (2009).

Table 1

Service provider	Type of funding	Service offered & main beneficiaries
ICDS	Central/State Government	Integrated care and education services to children between 2-5 years (targets mainly children from economically underprivileged section both in rural and urban areas)
Education department	State/Central Government	Preschool education for children between 3-5 age group
Private preschools	Self-financing	Formal education for 3-5 age group (either attached with higher classes or with the primary wing)
Play-schools	Either self-financing or voluntary – run by NGOs / CBO's / Faith based organisation	Day-care and/or informal education to 2-5 years
Early years centres	Corporate companies (as part of corporate social responsibility)	Day-care and/or informal education for 2-5 age group

Advocates of early years provision claim that the early years are a significant time in human life and that the financing of early years provision benefits individuals, as well as, society at large (Arnold, 2004; Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1994; Evans, 1996; Myers, 1995). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) envisaged early years provision as a tool for the realisation of children's rights and well-being (Siraj-Blatchford & Woodhead, 2009). These ideas were incorporated into the Indian National Curriculum Framework (2005) as well as into a draft Early Childhood Education Curriculum Framework (2012) which strongly promotes a holistic approach for the early years that recognised a diversity of childhoods. In reality, however, the unregulated nature of provision and the diversity of providers mean that the formal classroom approach to learning has gained widespread acceptance in early years settings in India (Velayutham, 2005).

Further factors to take into account are the tradition of English-medium education in India. English-medium education is widely valued, perceived and utilised by parents as a tool for ensuring career success across all sections of the society (M. S. Swaminathan

Research Foundation, 2000). Post-independence educational theory sought to simplify the myriad of social and cultural approaches to learning in India by borrowing from Western constructivist and behaviourist learning theories, which promoted rigid approaches to educational planning at the expense of traditional indigenous educational pedagogies (Jeffery, 2005; Nawani & Jain, 2011). As a result, the field of early years education is now filled with buzzwords such as ‘child-centred education’, ‘age-wise development’, ‘stage-wise development’ and so on (Viruru, 2001b). This buzzword approach to learning has not been critically examined by researchers, and we know little of how extrapolations of Western theories play out in everyday lives (Viruru, 2001b). This means that notions of the universal child appear in the official curriculum in taken-for-granted ways, and there is a real danger that a lack of debate and analysis may lead to practice that downplays children’s ability to think, put forward their views and influence pedagogy. In contrast this chapter argues that pedagogy is always a contested terrain that there is fluidity in everyday practices and that children actively contribute and participate in the production of pedagogy.

Children, childhood and children’s participation

Rights-based approaches to childhood also make claims to universality, and this can create conflict ethically and culturally when they are transposed into specific countries (Boyden, 1990; Woodhead, 2006). Early analysis of the UNCRC relied on developmental psychology and neuroscience to define who children are, how they develop and how their rights can be realised universally (Burman, 1996, Woodhead, 2006). However, with the advent of a social constructionist approach, “much more inclusive frameworks are now available, within which diverse early childhood settings and practices are identified and taken-for-granted early childhood discourses are deconstructed” (Woodhead, 2006, p 23-24).

Children’s rights related issues such as child labour, child marriage, child soldiers, have been contested and debated within a multi-disciplinary examination of children’s rights. At the centre of this debate sits the idea that western notions of childhood are based on cultural ignorance of how such issues are understood and constructed in different settings (Boyden, 1990; Burman, 1995, 1996). A tension has emerged between children’s rights and post-structural ideas in childhood studies that seek to translate theory into practice and vice-versa. More fluid post-structural, social constructionist and socio-cultural perspectives in childhood studies have provided more freedom for scholars to think ‘out of the box’ (Cannella, 1997, 2004; Viruru, 2001b).

Theoretically, even though these complex and fluid approaches have recognised the multiplicity of childhoods, they have also been accused of generating a degree of relativism and uncertainty, particularly when it comes to policy (see Wyness, 2012). The difficulty for policy makers is how to ensure that policies are fair and equitable to all children, at the same time as recognising their diversity. Proponents of culturally sensitive approaches argue that this quandary is also the strength of their position, in the sense that a focus on the multiple realities and perspectives of childhood raises awareness among members of policy communities, of the complexity of childhood and the need for more thoughtful policy-making (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001; Moss & Petrie, 2002). They argue that by critiquing universal truth, rejecting absolute knowledge and deconstructing dominant discourses in, for example, the early years, we can add incrementally to our knowledge and scholarship of childhood.

At the policy level, the emergence of UNCRC was a very significant landmark achieved globally that recognised children, including very young children, as equal human beings whose rights should be respected and voice should be heard. The articles in the UNCRC state that to accomplish children's rights, children should be first viewed as 'right holders' and allowed to participate in a meaningful way in the events that directly affect their lives (UN General Comment 7, 2005). While articles 2 and 5 in the UNCRC talk about state and parental responsibility that should enable children to participate in public life, article 12 of the UNCRC sets out children's right to participation.

Article 12 states that children have the right to participate in the events that affect their lives. This means that children should be consulted and involved in the decision-making process. Some scholars have considered the wording of this article to be ambiguous concerning the activities, patterns and pathways of participation (Gallagher, 2008; Tisdall & Davis, 2004), whereas others have suggested there is a fundamental problem in the definition - participation for what - for children's development, for children's decision making, to ensure democratic governance, or to enable social change (Davis & Hill, 2006; Thomas and Percy-Smith, 2010)? They have also sounded caution about the term increasingly being used in technocratic and political jargon, and suggest that participation is most meaningful when it is rooted in children's everyday lives.

Children's participation can differ significantly in terms of purpose, process, structure, power relation and outcome. For example, the degree of children's participation in school or family may differ from children's participation in policy consultation, because of the structure in the set-up or familiarity with the subject. Likewise, children's participation in one educational environment may differ from another because of its pedagogic nature or pedagogic authority in everyday practices. MacNaughton and others (2007) argue that it is possible to consult and involve young children in early years provision. However, we cannot expect that children will participate in the same way as adults; "children and young people may prefer communicating their views by means that are outwith the rules of the game" (Tisdall & Davis, 2004, p 137).

By using Foucault's (1977, 1982) conception of power that suggests power is diffused and omnipresent, Gallagher (2008, p 403) argues that it is unwise to imagine 'children's participation as a process by which adults, who 'have' power, empower children by "'giving' them some of this power". He further argues that there is no need to view adults as absolute power holders, instead we need to closely examine the ways through which power is exercised and how power equally enables children to participate in everyday activities. This can be contrasted with existing theories that classify "children's participation according to who has power: adults, children or both" (Gallagher, 2008, p 399). With that in mind, my research study analyses children's everyday practices with regard to participation in early years settings.

The methodology

Amongst the Indian states, Tamil Nadu is one of the very few states where the publicly funded and delivered ICDS programme has been relatively successful (Rajivan, 2006). However, at the same time, it has also experienced a rapid commercialisation and privatisation of early years provision in the cities compared to rural areas (National Council

of Educational Research and Training, 2006; Velayutham, 2005). Chennai¹ - the capital city of Tamil Nadu, was chosen as the location of the study, because it had different types of service provision.

It has been argued that deeply divided service provision provides different platforms for children to experience different kinds of childhood and prepares them for different adulthoods (Jeffery, 2005). Keeping that in view, the present study conducted as part of my PhD research, explored children's everyday lived experiences in three early childhood centres. The original intention of the study was to examine pedagogical processes and practices and analyse the complexity and fluidity involved in childhood. This chapter can only cover a limited aspect of the data collected and so it analyses the data collected from one centre, a private nursery. The intention of the chapter is not to critique the functioning of the institution or the approach of its staff members towards children; instead, the aim is to understand how children function within a formal pedagogical context and what this might mean for children's rights and well-being, especially their right to participation in everyday practices. The nursery attracts children mainly from the nearby neighbourhood.

Ethnographic observation in the private nursery was carried out from January 2011 to March 2011, at least one or two days in a week. The nursery operated from Monday to Friday, from 9.30 am to 3 pm, so the timing and day of observations varied depending on what was available to be observed on a particular day. In general, visits lasted three to four hours. Fifteen visits were made in total to the The Upper Kindergarten (UKG) class which included 28 children aged five years of age (of which about half were girls). The visits mainly employed observation, listening, and informal conversations as tools for data collection.

In the childhood research literature, methodological and ethical issues concerning research with children are extensively discussed. The foundation for these methodological and ethical debates has emerged mainly from the epistemological and ontological shift that took place in childhood studies emphasising that children should be treated with dignity and their views should be heard in a respectful way in the whole research process (James *et al.*, 1998; Qvortrup, Bardy, Sgritta & Wintersberger, 1994).

Drawing on this respectful tradition, this study also considered children as competent individuals, and as a result they were treated as chief architects of my analysis. Nevertheless, what is demonstrated here is one side of the story that happened in the early years institution, the author's reconstruction of the social reality, which is attached to the author's theoretical position, mental disposition and ethical commitment. Like any other research study, the piece of research work that has been produced here is embedded in certain theoretical, methodological and ethical positions, thus, the findings discussed in the chapter cannot be considered to be universal truth or knowledge.

Foucault's work on 'truth' is relevant here to explain this phenomenon further. Foucault suggests "truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements" (reported in Rabinow, 1991, p 74). So, whatever claims are made through this paper are contestable from other perspectives. For example, another person who has a different theoretical position, say a

¹ Chennai, formerly known as Madras is the capital city of Tamil Nadu. Chennai is the fourth most populous city in India next to Mumbai, Kolkata and Delhi. According to 2001 census the city had a population of 6.42 million people.

positivist or modernist, can investigate the same topic and ascribe a completely different interpretation to the same data. This suggests, as Davis (1998) notes, that researchers always have two world views - the one constructed by their academic paradigm including theory, ethics and methodology, and the other constructed by their life experiences and prejudices, and both were taken into account in the research process.

Everyday pedagogy: a closer look

The private nursery in which I observed, practiced a formal academic curriculum that was set out by the Tamil Nadu Matriculation Board. The guidelines for the curriculum² state that the methodology used for teaching should be ‘activity-based’, ‘participatory’, ‘age-appropriate’ and ‘developmentally appropriate’. On the one hand, the cultural model of formal learning in India focuses on memorisation and repetition (Viruru, 2001a), on the other hand, the official pedagogy, which is somehow influenced by the UNCRC and global early years discourse, underscores the need for a participatory approach in learning. This suggests that there is negotiation, mediation and synthesis of different perspectives and realities in everyday practices. One day,

The teacher told children to write numbers from one to ten in words in joint letters. *Ganesh* has shown his notebook to the teacher for correction. The teacher strikes out that page which was not written in joined letters and asked him to write in joined letters. After correcting a couple of notebooks she realised that most of the children in the classroom do not know how to write in joined letters. She again wrote on the board explaining slowly how to write. Then she has written on the notebook of those who have written incorrectly and asked them to write each word five times (field notes).

On another occasion,

After the teacher took daily roll call she went to change the date and day which is written on the top corner of the blackboard. Before she wiped the blackboard she looked at the children and asked

Teacher – Today is what day?

One child – Erm, eleven (11th)

Teacher – I am not asking the date. I am asking the day.

One child – Erm, Sunday

Teacher – How many days in a week? I just taught this yesterday.

Children – Sunday (they said again)

Teacher – No, today is Friday.

The teacher didn't explain anything further and began to teach a lesson (field notes)

The examples fit in with Thapan's (2006) opinion that teachers in the formal education system in India use group instruction as the primary pedagogic tool. In a highly structured formal education system, there is less space for individual explanation and clarification. Further, as some writers suggest, the system seemed to be concerned with the end product rather than the process; it encourages passive learning not active learning; and it

² The document ‘pre-primary stage: expected outcome’ was accessed at the Government of Tamil Nadu, Directorate of Matriculation Schools website <http://dge.tn.gov.in/matricsyllabus/preprimary.pdf> on 30th January 2013.

emphasises memorisation and repetition instead of facilitating children's reasoning or reflection (Jeffrey, 2005). Perhaps, the learning process here may provide space for interpretation, yet the process mainly dissuades children from active participation. The example above also suggests a particular way of participating. However, the child can be participating in many ways, for example, by rebelling overtly, or by thinking within his head.

Lakshmi was scribbling some drawings on the notebook instead of writing English alphabets and words. The teacher strikes out those two pages where Lakshmi scribbled and asked her to write alphabets and words on a fresh page (field notes).

The extract above demonstrates the child's participation in everyday pedagogy in a subtle rebellious way. Lakshmi is engaging in an activity which is of her own interest - a choice that seems to stand in contradiction with the everyday official pedagogy of the teacher, which demands a certain kind of embodied action and a particular kind of performance. This indicates that there is power politics involved in everyday pedagogy, where children and teachers negotiate and renegotiate their boundaries in practice.

In everyday pedagogical processes and practices, at times, as illustrated below, children appeared to accept the normative constructions and judgements established by the adult in the institution. For instance,

After the teacher taught a lesson in English, she told children to write in their notebook. During the writing exercise, looking at Deepthi's note Kavitha said "Hey, it doesn't look nice, look at there, how nicely miss has written" (field notes).

The conversation between two children shows the influence of normative construction on children, that is, recognising the teacher's handwriting as the preferred one and that they should aspired to reach that level. This indicated that children at times are ready to accept the existing adult constructed worldview. Whereas, at other times, children seemed not to accept the adult constructed version of knowledge.

Today, Lucas and Murthy brought new workbooks, which contain mathematical tables, Tamil, English alphabets and letters, and shapes such as square, rectangle, triangle and cube. The workbooks are from two different companies; therefore, the shapes are not arranged in the same order in the workbooks. Initially, both were a bit worried whether they have bought the wrong ones. They went and asked the teacher whether the two workbooks were the same. She said 'yes'. Yet, they didn't seem to be convinced. Then, one by one they crosschecked the shapes and found everything was there in the workbook. Finally, they looked convinced that they both were the same (field notes).

The example above shows how children construct knowledge in everyday pedagogy – they did not accept the teacher's confirmation and they eventually double-checked their workbooks themselves. Dahlberg and others (2007, p 55) assert, that for some practitioners there is no need to see "knowledge as something absolute and unchangeable, as facts to be transmitted to the child, and thus as separate from the child, independent of experience and existing in a cultural, institutional and historical vacuum". Knowledge can also be constructed through participation in social interactions and processes.

Moreover, the process of learning and knowledge construction in everyday pedagogy involves different types of power, and power can accelerate or decelerate the degree of children's participation. At times, children were subjugated by pedagogical power and their bodies were disciplined, controlled and regulated in the learning process, as below, with authority.

Balu was pretending to write. The teacher noticed him for a while and asked him to bring his notebook to her table. Before he went, he removed all scribbled pages from the notebook. She checked his note book. It was empty and nothing written. She tweaked his ears and made him stand and write on her table in front of others (field notes).

This kind of public display underscored the message that performance failure warranted punishment from the authority. The teacher exercised her power over the child and her action re-emphasised the child's inadequacy and inability in performing certain embodied actions. Similarly, during the writing exercise, I observed that the teacher wrote in the notebook about those children who were slow in writing and asked them to repeat writing the same thing 5-10 times:

The teacher noticed that Arun was struggling with his writing; his handwriting did not appear legible to read. The teacher pulled his note, wrote once and asked him to repeat the same 5 times. He appeared struggling more now. All his peers finished. He continued his writing till the end of the session much to the taunting of his peers (field notes).

The teacher believed that a poorly performing child needed to practice more, so that he/she would develop his/her writing skills to the expected level. However, the teacher's action put more pressure on the child who was already struggling to write. It also created an image among his peers that he was a poor performer in the class and gave the teacher reason to pay extra attention to him.

On another occasion children showed resistance and dared to negotiate the power order sanctioned by official pedagogy.

In the Tamil period the teacher taught a lesson about activities – studying, writing, running, sleeping and so on. Children have been asked to stand and repeat what she teaches. A boy (Arun) from the corner of the last row was sitting on his chair. When the teacher called him in an authoritative voice, Arjun stood up for some time and sat again when she turned her attention to the other side (field notes).

Lansdown, (2006, p 139) asserts that participation is an “ongoing process of children's expression and active involvement”, and she argues that in the early years especially, participation involves both verbal and non-verbal engagement. The example above indicated the pervasiveness of pedagogical power entrusted on teachers in settings that take a formal and hierarchical approach to pedagogy. Perhaps, the intention of the teacher here was to produce the docile body so as to utilise its capacity for learning the way she wanted it to learn. Thus, she used her authority to subject *Arun*. At the same time, the boy has also used his agency to challenge the power order even though he didn't show any resistance to start with. This on-going process of power negotiation in everyday pedagogy suggests that the boundaries of power are fluid; children or teachers use their power for action over action

(Gallagher, 2008); and, children's position of 'power holder' or 'powerless victim' depend on context.

In the classroom, although the level of collective interactions was quite high, most of the time the group activities were teacher-led. For example, one day children were told to do a public performance: they had to sing rhymes with an action attributed to them individually by the teacher according to their seating order. Children stood up in the front and sang rhymes facing others in the classroom. In the lunch break the teacher told me her reason for the activity.

When children hear the rhymes many times it will automatically register in their mind (informal conversation with the teacher, field notes).

The data above can be connected to literature that argues that in 'formal' education systems children are constructed as the passive recipients of knowledge (Nawani & Jain, 2011). During this exercise, some children really struggled to sing and those who did not recite correctly were told to repeat their singing the next day. I wondered: "Was it not a humiliation for children who did not do well?". The teacher thought not:

No, children those who are not good will also learn from others and moreover slowly they develop to open up their mouth (informal conversation with the teacher, field notes).

The purpose of the exercise was not to develop rational thinking or reasoning; it was mainly for memorisation. The teacher's intention here was that repetition would help those children who were poor in memorisation and communication. This shows how children are conditioned through pedagogical techniques to achieve what is described as normal development. The idea of 'normal' or 'good' here is interpreted from the comparisons made between children of the same age group. The formal education system in India primarily demands memorisation from children and memorisation is considered as a form of learning (Sarangapani, 2003). Memorisation has a long history and connection with Hindu religious practices (Clarke, 2001; Viruru, 2001a). These cultural models of formal education in India have been criticised for focusing too much on "memorisation, discipline, and hard work; rather than on motivation, curiosity, and enjoyment in learning" (Clarke, 2001, p 170). In the extract above, children did not have a choice. Whether they liked it or not they had to deliver according to the teachers' instruction. During the group exercises, however, children exhibited a great deal of group effort and togetherness.

When a child struggled with the word or action others tacitly showed actions or gave a lead to the child with the starting word in the rhymes. (field notes)

The extract above corroborates with other early childhood literature that shows how children collaborate and rescue their peers during pedagogical practices (Markstrom & Hallden, 2009). Though the children and teacher were positioned differently in the power structure, children used their agency collectively to counteract classroom authority. I do not suggest that children always showed group solidarity and social relationships in this institution. I did see competition amongst children during my observations, especially on academic tasks. My intent is to illustrate the dilemmas that were sometimes faced in pedagogical practice, and how children negotiated with the teacher's authority in the classroom.

Discussion

The examples above gave a snapshot view of children's experiences in everyday pedagogy and their implications for children's right to participate. The pedagogy followed in the institution was influenced by Western educational philosophies and/or children's rights discourse. Nonetheless, the pedagogy, by also connecting with Indian and local culture, was converted into reality through an on-going process of interaction and mediation between all co-constructors. The pedagogical processes suggests that there was considerable fluidity in the early years institution that allowed integration of local cultural practices into everyday pedagogy. It seems that we should avoid assuming that official and teacher led discourses are directly translated into practice without any dilution.

The analysis demonstrated that children as emancipatory subjects are able to participate in everyday practices. Children were subjectified at times but at the same time they also challenged the power order either individually or collectively in the institution. This suggests there is always an on-going interaction and negotiation during pedagogical process and that children constantly define and redefine the power boundaries. The analysis further indicated that in everyday pedagogy children's ability to participate, depended on the context in which they were situated. Thus, it can be argued that the position of children and their ability to participate in their learning, is fluid and contextual.

Conclusion

The examples above problematize the ideas of learning and participation in early years provision. The repetitive act of academic performativity and evaluation, based on classroom standards, created an impression that some children were better than others. This discrimination had varying effects on the children's well-being, and it raised questions about whether the processes affected children's ability to realise their potential in ways that a more participatory learning approach might enable. The data suggested that children should be recognised as active players who can learn things in many ways and acquire knowledge through their embodied experiences. At times the learning was transmitted from the adult, and at other times it occurred in reaction to the adult or in spite of the adult.

There is great scope for teachers and parents to perceive young children as more than passive absorbers of the prescribed curriculum, and for considering what a more child-influenced curriculum might look like that positively utilises children's strengths and capacities in everyday classroom practices. Children may not express themselves in the same way as adults, or have the same subject expertise, yet, they know more about childhood, and their opinions should be consulted in educational planning (Mayall, 2000).

While pedagogy defines the nature and possibilities of interaction, it is the institution that provides space for actualisation (Deleuze, 2006). As early years literature suggests, the idea of childhood and children's rights need to be viewed as a fluid concept that happens constantly in a given social space in multiple ways (see for example, Dahlberg, 2003; MacNaughton, 2005; Taguchi, 2010). The notion of childhood is characterised by continuous change and alteration, like the idea of children's rights (Bloch, Kennedy, Lightfoot & Weyenberg, 2006; Dahlberg, 2003). A children rights perspectives promotes universal access to education, but that education is disrespectful of children's rights when ears are being tweaked. Childhood is always a process of becoming something. It challenges pre-defined

assumptions and truths, and provides choice for a multiplicity of pathways for attaining children's rights (Bloch et al., 2006; Sellers, 2010).

Children's rights, especially children's right to participate, were incorporated in principle in the official children's rights discourse, and a draft ECE curriculum framework (2012) in India. However this still appears to be a distant dream to achieve. To ensure children's participation, therefore, professionals in early years settings need to do more than simply pay lip services to the ideas envisioned in a draft national ECCE policy (2012) and a draft ECE curriculum framework (2012). These ideas need to be deeply internalised and institutionalised at all levels. Children's views should be taken seriously in all decisions affecting them and the cultural model, which assumes that adults know best, should be re-examined to be more respectful of children's capacity and competency. Not all settings or teachers involved in the study were like this, but it would appear that massive change is required in the mindset if a more child-centred culture of participation is to be achieved in this setting.

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