



**Toolkit for the promotion and protection  
of child participation in the Americas**

# **PARTICIPATION as creative action**

*Project: "Protection and  
Promotion of Children's Rights  
in the Inter-American System"*

**2011**



Organization of  
American States



Inter American  
Children's  
Institute

Specialized Organization of the OAS



Canadian International  
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## PROLOGUE

In its Action Plan for 2007-2011, the Inter-American Children's Institute proposed, amongst other outcomes and outputs, to "generate actions in favour of the right to participation and citizen education in childhood and adolescence", associated with the production of a Participation Model containing a definition of participation arrived at in agreement with the countries, and providing tools and advice which will enable them to reinforce their activities in this area.

The IIN has been working on the production of this Participation Model, drawing up several instruments which will contribute to the work of the States and of society, in order to guarantee, protect and promote the right to participate of the children of this continent. However, a number of events, agreements and commitments took place before it was possible to arrive at this model, which should be specifically mentioned.

- The starting point of the process was fixed in 2004. The "International Meeting on Children's Participation in Latin America" was held in Cuenca, Ecuador, during which thoughts on the participation experiences carried out in participants' countries were shared. This landmark event set the tone for discussion on the subject of participation as a guaranteed right in regional political agendas.
- In April 2008, the IIN, in collaboration with UNICEF, held an Inter-American Child Forum in Querétaro, Mexico, entitled "My Right to Participate". This forum constituted an opportunity for the exchange of ideas for participating children from 13 States.
- At the 83rd Regular Meeting of the Directing Council of the IIN, which took place in Ottawa, Canada in October, 2008, the agenda for the Twentieth Pan American Child Congress to be held in Lima, Peru, in September 2009 was approved, focusing on the discussion of four main focal points: the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the Convention, international cooperation, public policy for care systems and child participation. A working group on child participation was formed, composed of the representatives of twelve countries.
- The First Intergenerational Meeting of the Child Participation Working Group was held in Quito (2009), in order to define the forms of intervention of the adolescents attending the Twentieth Congress, a space traditionally reserved for State authorities, technicians and diplomats. An agenda and the general methodology to be used during the First Pan American Child Forum were established, as well as the creation of a web site and the systematization of successful participation experiences in the region. It is now possible to gain access to a framework of reference based on the experiences submitted by the States, with a special emphasis on policies which promote this right.
- The First Pan American Child Forum (Lima, Peru, 2009), in which 61 children representing 22 American nations participated, was the specific output of this line of action. At this event, children exchanged infor-

mation and drafted a summary based on their own experience of rights, particularly participation. They worked collectively, with the support of specialized facilitators from the entire region.

- At the Second Meeting of the Working Group on Child Participation in Panama (2009), progress was made regarding the validation and publication of a joint Framework of Reference for the region on child participation, as well as the first agreements for the construction of a child participation indicator proposal. A proposal for a child participation model for the Americas was submitted, which contained a work guide to design child participation public policy, a child participation trainers' training course, and a child participation toolkit and methodology handbook, and which indicated which actors this material was aimed at.
- In May 2010, the Third Regional Child Participation Meeting was held in Uruguay. On this occasion, the Framework of Reference was presented and the "Proposal for an Indicators Menu to Measure Child Participation" was discussed, with the purpose of establishing a number of indicators with which to observe, measure and determine the value of this right in the initiatives which may be implemented in the future.
- In November 2010, the final version of the Indicators Menu was presented in Bogotá, Colombia. On that occasion, steps were taken to make the countries' desire to continue the working group a reality, in order to extend and reinforce the promotion and defence of this right and, in particular, to institutionalize the means for children to voice their opinions (consultative councils).

Together with this line of action determined by the countries, there is a need for everyone who is involved in the promotion of participation to be provided with access to theoretical and technical material containing tools and methodology, thus consolidating some of the actions and exchanging the various experiences being implemented in several of the countries with regard to this right.

Action undertaken so far has made it clear that it is necessary to have instruments available to strengthen the capacity of the States and of civil society, in order to guarantee the fulfilment of child rights and above all, the right to participation. This underpins the importance and commitment of putting together jointly the material we need for all of us to share our experience and lessons in the field of the promotion and protection of the right to participation.

The work methodology in this material features a compilation of the various activities carried out in our countries and in regional meetings, such as, for example, the tools used in the First Pan American Child Forum held in Lima, Peru (2009).

Although this paper does not intend to provide a systematization, it will contribute to discussions of tools to use when promoting child participation. Thus, we shall be able to make progress, both nationally and regionally, in the design of new strategies to standardize the methodologies used in our work, aiming at achieving genuine and effective participation for all children.

The following is a summary of the features of the material in this toolkit:

- ✓ *It is easily accessible to anyone who is interested in promoting participation.*
- ✓ *Children can develop an interest in promoting participation with this toolkit. If they do, it is recommended that they should be supported and guided in this learning process and experience.*
- ✓ *The intention of this material is to guide and promote reflection regarding tools which have proved useful when working on the promotion of children's right to participation.*
- ✓ *It seeks to encourage the accumulation of new contributions to everyday work involving the promotion of child participation.*
- ✓ *The toolkit's recommendations should be taken as a guide, and not as a collection of recipes to be applied exactly. It is expected that it will be possible to recreate this tool.*
- ✓ *It seeks to promote an exchange of ideas on the basis of the lessons learned and knowledge that participation promoters possess.*
- ✓ *It can be applied to any set of circumstances.*





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# Introduction



## INTRODUCTION

The Inter-American Children's Institute (IIN) focuses its actions on the basis of the acknowledgement of participation as a right, in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Inter-American Democratic Charter. The CRC recognizes that children's participation includes having access to information, having and giving opinions on subjects which concern them, and being heard by adults. It is, in addition, a cross-cutting principle which contributes to the consolidation of other rights. From the first, the CRC has promoted the design of State policy, as well as of a number of regional platforms and measures which have led to a better understanding and fulfilment of its principles. For example, General Comment N°12, drafted by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009), provides an in-depth conceptual explanation of the content of the CRC. For its part, the Inter-American Democratic Charter<sup>1</sup> establishes in its Article 6 that:

***“It is the right and responsibility of all citizens to participate in decisions relating to their own development. This is also a necessary condition for the full and effective exercise of democracy. Promoting and fostering diverse forms of participation strengthens democracy.”***

Maintaining that participation is a right implies the need to have access to tools in order to monitor its fulfilment and ensure its enforceability. The IIN, together with the Member States of the Inter-American System, are taking one more step towards consolidating the legitimate acknowledgement of children as holders of rights. In the current situation in the region, it is imperative to move forward from the concept of a “problem child” to that of a “child with proposals”. To make these propositions a reality requires strengthening the commitment and capacity of States and society with regard to guaranteeing and promoting the right to/principle of participation.

However, the notion of citizenship is often interpreted from the point of view of adults, who determine how children will exercise their rights according to their own perspectives and needs. Although it is not our intention here to carry out a study or research into child citizenship from an adult perspective, it is important to identify some of the ideas which may hinder the promotion and protection of rights, particularly the right to participate. On the one hand, there are certain adult-centred attitudes which may be understood as the asymmetrical relationships



<sup>1</sup> Adopted at the first plenary session, held on 11 September 2001.

imposed by adults who act as coordinators of activities involving children. They consist in viewing reality through the lens of an adult and thinking that this is the only legitimate viewpoint, which leads to making decisions bearing in mind only an adult's ideas or perceptions. It should be noted that this position is not exclusive to adults – adolescents can also adopt this attitude, for example, by monopolizing knowledge, or obstructing communication between participants in an activity. We have observed how adolescents with most experience in this field reproduce the leadership of participatory processes. Adolescents frequently position themselves as adults in groups with younger children and tend to reproduce the attitudes they have observed in adults. We have also noted that children adopt passive attitudes and wait for adults to make decisions.

On the other hand, we have seen some activities which have been proposed by children and which do not provide opportunities for them to participate by giving their opinions, or contributing or suggesting new ideas and projects, on the grounds that they are not yet prepared for such participation. Another example is to be found in activities generated by adults that only involve games (which can be a part of the participatory process), which is not a bad thing, but does not necessarily recognize the evolving potential of children. This can be understood as infantilization, in the understanding that children's effective potential to participate is being limited.

Reality in most American countries shows that children have very few opportunities to make decisions, and that their proposals are not given the same degree of recognition in all of our countries, nor in all institutions or social organizations to which they belong and in which they participate. Their interests and needs are therefore very often not taken into consideration. The explanation for this cannot be found by looking at any single factor; it is rather, grounded in the process of development of our peoples and the cultural features which are part of that process. At the same time, there are a variety of policies and actions being set in motion with the purpose of recognizing and guaranteeing the right of all children to participate. In this respect, the lack of their own spaces outside of formal educational settings and/or the presence of settings which entail the availability of financial resources constitute one of the deficiencies.

One of the short-term alternatives, as a way of moving towards the realization of the right to participation for all children, is setting up and implementing intergenerational work spaces. With this we seek to reinforce what experience has shown; that we learn to participate by transmitting experience, we learn through exchange, practice and through the incorporation of different viewpoints with regard to the same situation. Adults must bear in mind this reality and find ways of changing it by putting forward different proposals and activities which will guarantee the inclusion of all of the social actors who are part of society.

We need to reinvent appropriation and coexistence strategies which will make it possible to include child participation as a routine focal point in our lives, restructuring our experience and our practices as a form of becoming

aware that there are many situations and problems which can be resolved jointly, attempting to include the various viewpoints and different kinds of knowledge we all possess. The first steps began to be taken after the adoption of the Convention (CRC)<sup>2</sup>; henceforth our efforts will aim to include children in the different spaces which the operation of society involves. Through child participation our peoples will become more equitable and we shall move forward as a society.

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2 The Convention on the Rights of the Child. 1989







# **1 Basic concepts regarding the promotion and protection of child participation**



# 1. BASIC CONCEPTS REGARDING THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF CHILD PARTICIPATION

## A starting point

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, approved on 20 November 1989, proposes – amongst other things – a new legal, social and cultural concept of how persons under the age of 18 can act within society. After the approval of the Convention, Member States began to create the legal means and structures in order to recognize children as holders of rights, and to identify some of the basic and fundamental principles which all policy for children should include.

The four guiding principles of the Convention are:

- 1. Non-discrimination.** No child should suffer in any way by reason of race, creed, colour, gender, language, caste, situation at birth or any kind of physical impediment.
- 2. Best interest of the child.** When public or private institutions, authorities, courts or any other body must make decisions involving children, they must consider those which will result in the children's greatest well-being.
- 3. Survival and development.** The measures taken by the States to preserve the life and quality of life of children must guarantee the harmonious development of children in physical, spiritual, psychological, moral and social terms, bearing in mind their capacity and talents.
- 4. Participation.** Children, being persons and holders of rights, can and should express their opinions in matters that affect them. Their opinions must be heard and taken into account in the political, economic or educational agenda of a country. Thus, a new kind of relationship is generated between children and State and civil society decision makers.



No right is more important than another; all are equally important in the sense that they guarantee the general welfare of children. However, when the purpose is to promote participation, special note must be taken of Article 12:

*“States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”*

*“For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.”*

On the basis of Article 12, it is possible to elicit the following components of participation:

**BEING INFORMED:** This is the action by means of which children receive information about subjects which concern them, adapted to their capabilities and adjusted regarding quantity and quality.

**GIVING OPINIONS:** This means that children should have opportunities to submit ideas and proposals on subjects which directly involve them, or in which they are interested, and includes the possibility of forming their own opinions individually and/or collectively.

**BE HEARD:** This refers to children’s right to have their opinions on the different subjects that interest them or involve them directly be received and respected by adults.

**INFLUENCING DECISIONS:** This refers to children’s right to have their opinions on the different subjects that interest them or involve them directly be taken into account.

No dimension of participation is more important than another, nor is it temporal; it is necessary to incorporate all of its dimensions in our work as a form of guaranteeing a vision and a model which includes children as holders of rights, and on that basis, generate opportunities for joint work to promote and protect their participation. In other words, we visualize a process in which participation gradually assumes its own singular features. Similarly, it is possible to state that these components should not only be promoted in the construction of spaces and relationships on behalf of participation in itself, but should also be included or provided for in any action or relationship which includes children.

In order to understand and recognize the component elements of participation, we shall think about general features which can be applied to all groups of children:

- The first element to bear in mind is children’s right to be informed. This means that we should provide clear information, adapted to the capabilities of the participants, with regard to why they have been invited, in what framework and what the work proposal entails. We should also explain why we are working with them and clearly outline our role as adults in this activity and the tasks we shall be responsible for.
- Next is the right of all children to give their opinions, which should also be clearly explained from the first meeting, since it is on the basis of their opinions that we can begin to feed this space with ideas and proposals with regard to the subjects that interest them.
- The next principle we must work on is children’s right to be heard, which is a priority on these occasions, since we would be contravening this right if we failed to listen to children’s opinions. We adults should learn how to take children’s opinions seriously and accept them, listen to them and answer them, as a way of jointly constructing a participatory work space.
- Finally, we come to children’s right to influence decisions. This is a basic element, as it implies directly including their opinions and interests in decisions which affect them. In the case of working with a group, it implies that after a certain period of work during which different interests, ideas and proposals are put forward, papers should be drafted, or joint actions outlined, in order to promote and protect the group’s participation.
- Include here the overall right to participate and exhibit responsibility, act and or involve one-self in processes or events that are embarked on after a decision has been influenced/ made. This takes participation of the child to the ultimate level, allowing a child to indeed demonstrate adult like qualities, feel, be apart of, taking leadership and owning his or her involvement in a reflective process.

### An operative definition of participation

*“A process is participatory when children’s right to be informed, give their opinions, be heard and influence decisions made in matters of their particular interest and concern is fulfilled in family, judicial, educational, health, institutional, community and public policy settings; always according to the principles of non-discrimination, progressive autonomy, best interest of the child and the right to life and guarantees for survival and development”<sup>3</sup>.*

Owing to the concern which is felt with regard to the fulfilment of this right, a number of actions to promote it have been established, which seek to charge the States with the obligation to guarantee it. In this respect, some

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3 Menu of Indicators and Monitoring System for Children’s Right to Participation, October 2010, IIN.

of the most significant advances achieved lately include the drafting of a Framework of Reference on Participation (May 2010)<sup>4</sup>, and the celebration of the First Pan American Child Forum (Peru, 2009)<sup>5</sup>, an event at which children had an opportunity to be informed, give their opinions, be heard by the authorities and draft papers with and for those responsible for designing and implementing public policy for children in the region. The following is a summary of the suggestions given by adolescents during the forum.

1. The participation of children in budget allocations should be encouraged, particularly in matters which affect them directly.
2. Consultative children's entities should be formed in order to advise on the design and implementation of government policy.
3. International child participation organizations should be formed for children to give their views.
4. Child participation should be meaningful, active and inclusive.
5. Participation and mutual respect in family settings should be promoted by means of awareness-raising for adults, so that they will respect the opinions and points of view of children<sup>6</sup>.

### The components of the child participation process

The word **'process'** comes from the Latin *processus*, which refers to the action of moving forward, proceeding from a beginning to a contemplated end, the action of continuously going along through each of a succession of acts, events, or developmental stages<sup>7</sup>. Viewing participation as a process implies cyclical development and a readjustment of places, positions, opinions, beliefs and assumptions, making it necessary to reflect upon and evaluate our task or objectives at all times.

The model described shows the links between the components of participation (to be informed, give opinions, be heard and influence decisions) from a temporal or process perspective. To view or understand these components in isolation or in a situational manner does not endow the abilities involved with their true value; they should, in fact complement each other. In addition, the mere announcement or promotion of the right does not generally guarantee that participation is exercised and acknowledged. Thus, participation is observed as the

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4 Child participation in the Americas, 20 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. IIN-OAS, May 2010.

5 Thinking about participation by participating - The experience of the 1st Pan American Child Forum, within the framework of the Twentieth Pan American Child Congress, Lima, Peru, September 2009.

6 Report on the child participation experience at the First Pan American Child Forum, June 2010.

7 Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary, <http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/cgi-bin/unabridged?va=process&x=0&y=0>

level of empowerment that children are able to develop on the basis of these components and the recognition of their rights, on their own initiative, taking age into account, and according to the subjects they are interested in.

Participation as a 'process' also reflects the fact that it can take place in a variety of scenarios and dynamic settings; that it can be effective for intervention in the most basic forms of participation (games) as well as in public and political models of intervention. Both forms are equally valid; the process does not necessarily imply that one of them should occur before or after the other, or that one has more value or is more important than the other. This observation rests upon the contributions made by Roger Hart on the concept of participation as a process, when he proposed a path which goes from manipulation to autonomous decision (the participation ladder), reflected above all in the management of actions or projects.

As the participatory process is constant and continuous, it reflects the expression of interests, needs, emotions and experiences (as well as stereotypes) which begin to connect to each other, as well as with those of the group or plenary of participating children. Promoting an atmosphere of free socialization, equal opportunities for expression, active listening and the fostering of personal and group decision-making requires guidance. This is why the participation process is also regarded as an opportunity for socialization and learning; even more so as it involves people who are developing and undergoing specific cognitive growth processes.

In this respect, the participatory process will depend on the people involved, their expectations and interests, and on whatever arises during interaction; always building upon previous experiences in order to announce new forms of relationship and coexistence. It is, therefore, a helicoidal or spiral-shaped process. We shall not refer to the process as a sum or transfer of stages, but as a linking of states or levels of empowerment which can be interconnected, but also make use of or draw upon aspects of the preceding state or level. From this perspective, up to seven moments or states have been identified.

## PARTICIPATION AS A RIGHT

The process begins with the first acknowledgement of participation as an element which is part of one's being, as a right and a means to coexist. To view it in this way, provides the road to new ways of being citizens.

**COEXISTING**  
*Evaluate oneself  
Evaluate ourselves.  
Shaping an identity.*

Being rights-holders, citizens, necessarily enables them to think collectively, and to think about the elements that enable this coexistence to be free integrating and democratic. It forces them to rethink themselves and others.

**BEING**  
*To recognize and  
be recognized  
"citizenship"*

All progress, achievements and obstacles that they experience personally and as a group, allow them to understand their rights better and fully enjoy them.

**ACTING**  
*Deciding to start*

"Deciding to participate" implies taking on all of its components with responsibility and sharing with others; accepting coexistence in a group, as a "part" of something greater than oneself.

**BEING A PART**  
*Belonging*

The most specific form of showing that one belongs to a "whole" (group, action) is by conducts which show belonging, appropriation; responsibly seeking to share control. For example: organization and first leadership experiences.

Comprehensive Rights  
**PARTICIPATE**  
*Emerge from "me", think about "us"*

**HAVING**  
*Empowering oneself*

Transform, propose, reinforce, sustain, are qualities which will be better assumed when children feel that they are a part of something and that they can intervene in order to help in something that is theirs, and which, therefore, benefits them.

**DECIDING**  
*Influencing*



### STATE: “Participating”

This first moment is related to the first initiative leading to action, intervention, participating in an action, be it one’s own or part of a group activity, which often emerges or is linked to the natural process of socialization. The first perspective of coexistence and social integration is based on this notion. It is referred to as a ‘zero’ stage because it is a necessary condition for any form of participation. This is why it has been placed as a central element in the chart, influencing every other moment or state.

### STATE: “Acting”

This is understood to be the first concrete and elementary proof of participation, seen as a certain way of acting or behaving, carrying out free and conscious actions which lead to producing a certain effect on something or someone. This action is based on an initial interest in participating which is not necessarily socialized or collective, and can be personal and individual. One example could be setting in motion a collective game at school, or joining a volunteer, sport, cultural or political activity.

### STATE: “Being part of”

This indicates a position in space, time or place and includes showing abilities, making things happen or gaining access to information. In line with the previous example, we could mention the kind of organization and leadership generated in sports teams, which reinforce a sense of belonging and the search for common objectives. This stage begins to show the first signs of coordination and shared control. In volunteer programmes, children begin to take on roles and develop tasks within a given structure, or structures constructed in a basic or natural manner amongst themselves.

### STATE: “Having”

This state is seen as an opportunity to appropriate and share internal decisions; to become empowered through actions which show it; such as proposing, reinforcing, supporting, transforming, maintaining; that is, be willing to do something and become involved in it, to profess or feel a certain attitude towards someone or something; to guard, care for or defend something.

## STATE “Deciding”

This refers to manifesting by word, image, sign or act, a person’s level of empowerment with regard to something or someone. Although this stage is similar to stage ONE (“Acting”), there is a difference in the quantity of information, where common objectives are positioned, what capabilities are possessed and what opportunities are provided so that a person can begin to be responsible for his or her own decisions. Examples of this can be found in situations in which children begin to leave significant marks with regard to their own and the community’s concerns.

## STATE: “Being”

**BEING** implies the possibility of identifying oneself as an individual, but in connection with a group, or with others. It determines an affirmation of rights and recognizing them in others. At this stage there begins to be evidence of new learning which will influence the person, the person’s group and the person’s participation. At this moment, children have experienced stages which have gradually reinforced their place within a team, group, collective or situation, increasing their confidence and allowing them to recognize themselves as citizens.

## STATE: “Coexisting”

Participation should enable children to open up to new spaces and experiences – with adults and with their peers – to proclaim their freedom and their progressive autonomy. In this respect, the act of participating is experienced as a time of possibilities, of acting, of being a part of, having, deciding and being – seeking to perform new actions, arising from consensus and reflection. It is also a moment which will lead to self-evaluation and to restate new strategies for participation, with which the cycle could begin again, but with a whole new series of specific experiences and needs. \*(through interaction with others- peers and adults- to use and transfer knowledge and experiences gained to influence and affect shared spaces/environment for growth and productivity. As one integrates the bound between self and others should be heightened.)



## **2 Undertaking strategies for the promotion and protection of child participation: Facilitation**



## 2. UNDERTAKING STRATEGIES FOR THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF CHILD PARTICIPATION: FACILITATION

### What does facilitating mean?

A facilitator is someone who promotes and guides training and inter-learning processes, fostering participation, organizing information and summarizing information on a given subject. He or she will also generate the necessary conditions to aim the group towards its objectives. The facilitator is an impartial person who should not take a position; it is the group that should arrive at its final conclusions.

To facilitate participation implies the existence of objectives, techniques and tools which will encourage the development of capabilities focusing on the search for autonomy, or the stimulation of freedom of opinion and decision for children. At the same time, however, it entails the need to set limits for the care and protection of children against risks or negative consequences this exercise might give rise to, or when preparing opportunities to exercise this right. This is why the task of facilitation should be provided for in any process and opportunity for the promotion of rights.



*“If we perceive the right to participation as a process which takes place in all settings of children’s lives – family, school and community – responsible adults in these areas need to recognize, facilitate and encourage this right every day. Participation cannot be the exclusive domain of specialists, but must crosscut and pervade all activities and work areas which include children. This is why it is necessary to provide training to all of those who work with children, in the most general terms.”<sup>8</sup>*

From this perspective, facilitation should be planned or considered by the persons (adults or children) who are part of the whole process of implementing public policies for children. Thus, it is service operatives, promoters and coordinators of programmes or projects who are called upon to take on this role.

In fact, it is possible to find differences or similarities between these roles or functions, and also to suggest reflection with regard to their leadership positions in the various types of participation which can occur. Bearing

<sup>8</sup> Child participation in the Americas, 20 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. IIN-OAS, May 2010.

in mind the model we have described, we shall make some comments that do not intend to represent the final word on the subject, but rather encourage reflection on the promotion and protection of child rights, and in particular, participation.

Facilitators can be adults or adolescents, who have the responsibility of facilitating the progress of an activity – coordinate schedules, meeting places, frequency, thematic focal points to be dealt with, etc. – always with close connection to the group of children. It is important that they should be aware of the role they are fulfilling and not take sides with any sector or group, which would distort the achievement of the objectives.

It is possible, and in some cases, even advisable, to work with other people to facilitate or foster participation, as long as their roles are clearly defined and there is no superposition of functions or contradictory messages which could confuse the group. This is often in response to the demands of the group, or even to the specific characteristics of the facilitators themselves, so that leadership may be established.

#### A PASSAGE FOR REFLECTION

## Learning to Participate

*“We understand participation to be a learning process which must be promoted within the family, school and community; the basic child-inclusion institutions. Participating is what children do every day.”<sup>9</sup>*

The participatory process in itself attempts to constitute an open space for the incorporation of new viewpoints which will enable this space to be nourished or transformed by the diversity of opinions, views and needs. The promotion of participation should not only be limited to its conceptual acknowledgement as a right, but should provide capabilities and opportunities for it to be exercised. Participation should therefore be addressed comprehensively, contemplating the diversity of children’s needs and interests.

In this respect, the use of techniques and tools that seek to generate a participation-fostering atmosphere will facilitate not only the incorporation of this right, but also a process of peer-learning and socialization, even in the case of adult guides. This can give rise to a horizontal space supported on the basis of interaction between people, with a strong emphasis on the expression of ideas, experiences, feelings and proposals generated during the course of working on a specific task with any group of children. Such a process will not necessarily take place in the classroom, with traditional teaching techniques or according to systematic behavioural evolution structures – on the contrary, its possibilities should be explored with techniques and tools which best connect with the characteristic dynamics of a group of children. Interaction will gradually strengthen and increase if we plan it according to the participatory model shown above.

9 Child participation in the Americas, 20 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. IIN-OAS, May 2010.

## The needs and interests of children with regard to the promotion of participation

*“And let us remember that, as children, we have the right to play, rest, express ourselves, give our opinions and be heard; in brief, to participate as the persons that we are in the society of which we are a part.” (Lima, 2009)<sup>10</sup>*

We should begin this section by remembering that there are certain features (needs, interests, thoughts, etc.) which are characteristic of children, who are in a cycle or stage in life which is remarkable for its continuous and swift growth process and the search for new areas and ways to develop at social, family and/or educational levels.

This transitional phase is not a period of inactivity; on the contrary, it is a stage in people’s evolution in which there is an intensive search for and interest in participating in a variety of areas, in becoming involved in life projects and, above all, a great deal of socialization, with an attempt to explore and attend to their own particular priorities and needs. From this perspective, childhood and adolescence should not be regarded as states that precede adulthood (“the process of becoming an adult”) or which lack full development (“incomplete adults”). A clear example of this problem of perception is to be found in the ongoing controversy involving the start and end of adolescence, evident in children’s laws or statutes which endow them with “adulthood” as from the age of 18 or 21. In this respect, it should be mentioned that in many regions, the passage from adolescence to adulthood goes hand-in-hand with ceremonies and/or celebrations which mark the end of one stage and the beginning of another.

In order to guarantee that the participatory process acquires a different meaning, **transcending daily routines and being adopted as a habitual practice, it is important to understand the general and specific features of being a child. This is no small task for adults** in their role of providing protection, help and guidance.

**An understanding of these characteristics should be an element included in the establishment of interpersonal relationships between adults and children, as well as an understanding of the possible variants which exist in this area; for example, the dilemma of peer representation and the perspective of learning through and for participation.**

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10 A teenager’s participation at the 1st Pan American Child Forum, September 2009, IIN-OAS, Lima, Peru.

# Representation

In the first place, we should start by providing a general definition, which will enable us to agree on a single interpretation, while bearing in mind the legal variations existing in each country.

**Representation:** A legal relationship – legally, judicially or voluntarily established – in which a person, known as a representative, acting within the limitations of his or her power, performs **acts on behalf of another person**, known as the representee, and in which the legal effects of the management of these acts devolve upon the representee<sup>11</sup>.

**Representative:** The legal status of a person who exercises a right or **performs an act on behalf of another**, owing to legal negotiation or to the stipulations of the law or a judge.

**Representation** refers to an action in which there are at least two roles: that of the person who represents and that of the person who is represented. It is understood **to be a relationship in which a person performs actions on behalf of another; in which a representative is assigned a special power to convey the voice and ideas of others and make decisions for others (the represented parties).**

**By way of example**, let us think of a secondary education centre. A mathematics teacher proposes that a group of twenty-five students should choose a representative in order to participate in a mathematics competition for teenagers.

The group will have to enter into agreements in order to determine who is willing to attend this competition on behalf of the whole group, agree or resolve upon the form of choosing this representative, for example – according to who knows most about the subject. This is in the understanding that the results obtained by this teenager at the competition will be owing to his or her own merit, but also through his or her peers', because they chose the right candidate.

There are two important stages in representation: to define a profile and to carry out the election process; activities which are not always democratically, or even transparently performed, and in which emotions and feelings are often involved. In the example above, the teacher may “propose” two or three names of people who have the best marks in mathematics, but they may be precisely the three people who are least popular with the group.

This shows that although the representative may fulfil some of the formal and institutionally-accepted requirements, there are others related to questions of empathy with the group, such as peer-relationships and solidarity, which contribute to the group's maintenance and development; objectives which go beyond the simple task of doing well in a competition.

In addition, there are situations in which representation implies giving an opinion, building consensus and making decisions before representatives of other groups, a task which involves being a spokesperson or taking a political position, to a greater degree. In this type of representation, discursive, discussion, consensus or negotiation abilities will also be useful; particularly when exchanging different interests and perspectives. Perhaps the level of responsibility demanded with regard to representation (both to stand as representative and to elect one) is linked more closely to the objective and its level of appropriation by the children's plenary. This new perspective can be regarded on the basis of the process model seen above, and is closely linked to the transition between State Three “Having”, and State Four “Deciding”.

The main thing is to understand that representation must be undertaken with a great deal of responsibility, seriousness and honesty; the representative will be trusted, and progress will be made towards the group or institution's perspective of itself as such. At the same time, representatives need to moderate the imposition of their personal opinions in the face of their representees' consensus. In some cases, they can even defend positions they do not fully share.

11 Adapted from the Spanish: Eduardo J. Couture. Vocabulario Jurídico (Legal Vocabulary). Ediciones Depalma, Buenos Aires, 1991. Page 520. Fourth Reprint.



## How to facilitate or promote child participation

*“Actions aimed at promoting the participation of children and adolescents should go hand in hand with interventions to facilitate understanding and acceptance on the part of the adults around them, whether at institutional, family or community level. The point here is not that children and teenagers should learn or responsibly exercise their right to participate, but that adults should accept, appreciate and respect their views, and learn to live with children who perceive themselves as active members of the community”<sup>12</sup>.*

When working in sub-groups, participants often tend to come together based on affinity. To avoid this, it is advisable to conduct icebreakers and ‘loosen-up’ activities to promote integration while making sure not to force or impose anything on participants. Indeed, a group-building technique will promote joint work amongst children who would otherwise not work together.

In the techniques described below the facilitator’s role is essential not only for prompting and guiding the group, but also for addressing any discomfort that may arise within the sub-groups. In certain cases the facilitator will need to make room for a participant’s proposals or comments, which have been dismissed out of hand. In the case of teenagers, who are reluctant to openly express their dislikes, it is definitely easier to elicit such expression in small groups of two or three participants where they may feel more at ease.

It is of critical importance to ensure that those who voice their opinion are not made fun of. While exchanges in small groups makes this less likely to happen, the facilitator should be alert and stop any mockery if and when it does occur.

Nor is it advisable to suggest activities that may expose participants to discomfort without previously implementing icebreakers to help them relax, loosen up and overcome inhibition.

Finally, when working with children and adolescents, the facilitator should bear in mind some of the aspects mentioned above, such as timing, place, activity proposed and number of participants, so as to work with them as successfully as possible.

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12 Child participation in the Americas, 20 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. IIN-OAS, May 2010.

Below are general guidelines readers should adapt and fine-tune to the specific activities they intend to engage in.

### **1. Strategies: programmes, projects, workshop and activities**

While all of these strategies are often implemented to promote their rights, it is in the workshop where children can directly interact with one another and with adults. This particular strategy helps convey information both ways, generate opinions and/or develop other activities designed to elicit participation. Thus, a workshop can be conceived in line with Santoyo's definition:

*"It is a dynamic process involving interactions and transformations, in which new situations add to those already experienced and resolved, engaging the entire group not only from a cognitive, but also from an emotional and social perspective."<sup>13</sup>*

### **2. Number of participants:**

We recommend an average number of twenty participants per group. If there happen to be more, you can split the groups or call upon more facilitators. This way, **each group member will have the chance to speak and listen to others.** In crowded groups facilitated by just one person, it is difficult for everyone to participate and find a role to play.

### **3. Environments that facilitate participation:**

When it comes to 'facilitating' spaces or environments, we must consider the essential steps and conditions needed for eliciting participation and promoting integration. **You should have suitable facilities – ideally, adequately lighted and ventilated.** Their size should harmonize with the number of participants – neither too large to avoid loss of concentration or cause difficulty in listening to others, nor too small, to ensure comfort.

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13 Santoyo, R. 1981. Algunas reflexiones sobre cómo coordinar grupos de aprendizaje (Some thoughts about coordination in learning groups), Revista de perfiles educativos, # 11, Mexico, p. 8.

#### **4. Timing:**

The time should be carefully estimated to make sure **participants do not stray from the main topic and keep focused**. Attention decreases as time passes. Workshops should not last more than one hour and a quarter, unless there is a break, in which case they could last longer.

#### **5. Opening or introduction:**

The opening is extremely important in every activity; it is at this stage that you can define basic aspects such as how long each session will take, frequency, matters to be addressed, objectives and other relevant considerations.

We suggest starting with something akin to a game –perhaps an icebreaker or group-building activity – to help **generate a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere**.

Recomendamos comenzar con alguna actividad lúdica que ayude a **generar un clima distendido y ameno**. Puede utilizarse una técnica de rompehielos o aprestamiento grupal.





# **3** Techniques and tools for the promotion and protection of child participation



### 3. TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS FOR THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF CHILD PARTICIPATION

We shall now present different techniques or strategies that can be directly used in the development of an activity. We should not forget that **these techniques must facilitate communication** amongst participants rather than become merely recreational activities. This should be borne in mind by group coordinators, as the techniques can sometimes operate as a defence, e.g. in the dreaded scenario where “no-one participates”.

Whenever coordinators propose an activity, they should first consider **the objectives pursued** and then the effectiveness or operational functionality of the technique selected. Any activity designed to foster and protect child participation should be based on the objectives pursued and not the other way round. Only then will the strategies and techniques proposed effectively elicit participation.

#### Specific guidelines:

1. To design a child participation promotion strategy, we should first clearly define the objective pursued.
2. Based on this objective, the facilitator should then consider the setting, the number of participants, the duration of the activity and the tools to be used, **always in pursuit of the objective set.**
3. Strategies can vary widely – the facilitator can work indoors, outdoors, touring, camping or going to the cinema. By this we mean that, bearing in mind the objective defined, the facilitator should be open to different modes of work.
4. It is often useful to introduce variants in the activities suggested or already implemented, so as to adjust them to the specific situation and the goal pursued.

In order to facilitate the use of this handbook, we shall now present a table where you will find the type of technique or tool that best helps develop each stage of child participation. You will see that most of the techniques can and must be adapted to the different objectives, so you will find them easy to use at the various stages of the process.



Participation stages	Technique suggested	Tools suggested
<b>Initial stage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Opening or introductory technique:</b></li> <li>• The net</li> <li>• The boat</li> <li>• Roll of paper</li> </ul>	<p>An <b>ice-breaking, opening or introductory technique</b> is a strategy designed to generate a good atmosphere amongst the group at the kick-off of a workshop, group meeting or plenary meeting. This tool will help engage participants in the activity proposed.</p>
<b>“Acting” Deciding to start</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The art critic</li> <li>• The knot</li> <li>• Who am I? Who are we?</li> </ul>	<p>The tool we suggest at this stage is designed to address individuality within the group and recognize the possibilities of engaging in a work project, taking the first step and assuming the responsibility such initiative entails.</p>
<b>“Being part of” Belonging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening to lyrics</li> <li>• Teenage diversity</li> <li>• Writing workshop</li> </ul>	<p>Being part of a group and achieving a sense of belonging gradually become apparent as the group begins to organize itself, objectives are set and leaderships surface. The tool we propose consists of prompting participants to play a role within the group, thus advancing toward autonomy.</p>
<b>“Having” Empowering oneself</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The silhouette</li> <li>• Complete the sentence</li> <li>• Blow out the candle</li> </ul>	<p>At this stage of the participatory process, the strategy suggested consists of playing a role, proposing actions and making the child/teenager realize he/she has the potential and the opportunity to exercise his/her right to actively participate.</p>
<b>“Deciding” Influencing others</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I elect my representative</li> <li>• Plenary meetings</li> </ul>	<p>From this stage on, the tools for advancing along the participatory process will involve making decisions through actions. Half-way through the process, the child/teenager has a better chance to exercise his/her rights.</p>



Participation stages	Technique suggested	Tools suggested
<p><b>“Being”</b> <b>Recognizing and being recognized</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Radio workshop</li> <li>• Photography workshop</li> <li>• Painting workshop</li> </ul>	<p><i>The tools we relate to “Being” involve displaying and sharing with others our interests and concerns, playing a role and accepting how the situation around us evolves. In the “radio workshop” technique, for instance, we are given the chance to make use of tools to create our own space. We are individuals entitled to rights; citizens.</i></p>
<p><b>“Coexisting”</b> <b>Shaping an identity</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mini Conference</li> <li>• Meetings</li> <li>• Mini Parliament</li> </ul>	<p><i>For the last stage of the participation cycle, we suggest setting the personal goal of acknowledging the importance of exercising the right to participate as a basic principle for living in democracy, and striving to become better citizens based on actual experience.</i></p>

***NOW IT'S YOUR TURN! CREATE YOUR OWN TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS!***

<b>Technique:</b>	
<b>Objective</b>	
<b>Time proposed</b>	
<b>Materials</b>	
<b>Requirements</b>	
<b>Brief description of the technique</b>	

**Technique:**

**Objective**

**Time proposed**

**Materials**

**Requirements**

**Brief description of the technique**

## APPENDIX 1. RECOMMENDED READING FOR REFLECTION ON THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF CHILD PARTICIPATION

### Passage 1 USE OF THE MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES

*“I think that if I were to speak of the image I have of a child, this would be the opposite of what I expect of a child. The quality which children have not lost is probably what we can expect from them: their ability to look at the world.”<sup>14</sup>*

We consider that the promotion and protection of children’s rights needs to continue focusing on the meaning and the possibility of communication. In this sense, we need to be aware that in our times communications media have diversified: we have written media such as newspapers or magazines, oral media such as radio, audiovisual media such as television and computers, as well as wonderful tools like access to the Internet and the use of Facebook.

Increasingly, however, although both adults and children can access a greater number of media, the spaces devoted to informing younger children and adolescents and engaging their participation are insufficient.

In this toolkit it is not our aim to study in depth why these processes exist, nor do we proclaim to own the truth; on the contrary, we encourage adolescents and adults working on participation to promote discussions about access to the communications media using the following questions, which are simply examples, as a starting point:

- What are communications media?
- Can I name the media operating in my town?
- What information do they provide to citizens?
- How many programmes targeting adolescents are there in my town?
- How many programmes are presented by adolescents?
- If I had a radio or TV programme or a column in a newspaper or magazine, what topics would I cover?

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<sup>14</sup> Larrosa, J. (2007), *Miradas cinematográficas sobre la infancia (Film perspectives on childhood)*, Buenos Aires, Argentina, p. 22, Miño y Dávila.

Finally, we suggest that whenever efforts are made to promote and protect child participation some time should be devoted to working on adolescents' real possibilities of analysing, proposing and challenging the information transmitted by their local media.

In this sense, an important objective is the use of some communications media (Facebook, for example) in a responsible manner, which implies a knowledge of the advantages or disadvantages, not from a moral perspective (this is right or wrong) but rather knowing and working on the responsible use of the medium as a tool for other purposes.

Similarly, it must be noted that in our continent there are examples of efforts to generate this type of information spaces. What is still to be achieved is acceptance by adults of the fact that it is possible to develop integrated communications programmes and products which take children's input and opinions into account.

## Passage 2 INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

*“It involves dialogic learning in which children learn together with the adults who interact with them, and with other children and adults who participate indirectly in these experiences, discovering that other forms of intergenerational relationship are possible, that giving children a different place will not lead to chaos, but to a different order which will contribute to improving the quality of life of all.”<sup>15</sup>*

This way of working generates an exchange that leads to constant learning, the exchanging of experiences and the possibility of committing to a shared objective: promoting and facilitating child participation.

It is time for the youngest to be able to generate knowledge and integrated learning about themselves, to be able to enjoy without reproducing adult models. This means that new models of coexistence must be created based on the inputs and the needs of all involved.

Devising participation spaces enables children to imagine and even implement new educational strategies, for example by developing artistic and creative areas in all learning centres, with a special commitment to the observance of their rights and to participation as a principle/right – children themselves are capable of designing their learning spaces and of creating participation, educational autonomy and citizenship.

We should bear in mind that with experience these will become everyday practices and that efforts must be made to turn them into a participatory model.

**The CRC introduced a new way of visualizing children which transcends the legal definition. The child as a legal person appears as a new protagonist of social relationships, whether they are between peers, between generations or with institutions.**

This fact has led work methodologies and strategies with children and adolescents to evolve from educational and social approaches to criminal or judicial ones, forcing the institutions that work directly with this population to consider adopting a new stance: **to start listening and thinking together with the children.** This new way of defining work makes it possible to provide effective solutions to different topics that relate to childhood and adolescence.

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<sup>15</sup> INN/OAS (2010). Child participation in the Americas, twenty years after the adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Efforts to apply changes have been made since 1989 but the results have often been minimal because policies about childhood and adolescence are still being drafted and enforced without the knowledge, the input or the consent of all those concerned.

Only two decades have elapsed and the space to be granted to children is still being developed since, as we have said, participation is a process and as such it requires time for changes to be generated by the interaction of all the interested parties.

This is an important point since children usually have different interests to those of adults; as agents of the promotion and facilitation of participation we should give first priority to listening; only then will we be taking the first steps toward a participatory process with shared interests.

### **What will happen when children start to make decisions?**

In general and based on our experience we believe that it is often difficult for adults to understand and accept the decisions and options made by children; this risk always exists since adults have a fundamental role in the work with these groups.

Adults who are points of reference should support each child's formative process in participation, giving priority to creating horizontal personal and work relations; and with full awareness that the different places, roles and responsibilities with regard to functions are not more or less important but simply different in their degree of commitment and participation.

In this sense, those of us who work in participation face a difficult task which requires joint learning and, above all, the setting out of standards and work guidelines to define and make viable the use of contents of interest to children.

## What does this mean?

Children's right to participation is enshrined in the CRC, so all adults have a duty to ensure promotion and protection of this right as a focal point in all our future decisions and actions.

***“Adults should forget the idea that we children have difficulty in expressing ourselves, that we are not capable of creating productive things, and that we do not know enough to participate. This is why they only impose, rather than promote or encourage our participation.”<sup>16</sup>***

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16 (2009). First Pan American Child Forum, Lima, Peru.



### Passage 3

## FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FIRST PAN AMERICAN CHILD FORUM

In our third session of the First Pan American Child Forum, the twenty-two delegates from Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Santa Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, United States, Uruguay and Venezuela, meeting in the Congresillo, worked on drafting the final recommendations to be delivered to the delegations participating in the XX Panamerican Child Congress.

We would like to share the following recommendations:

- Adults should forget the idea that we children have difficulty in expressing ourselves, that we are not capable of creating productive things, and that we do not know enough to participate. This is why they only impose, rather than promote or encourage our participation.
- Consultative councils should be formed at local, national, regional and Inter-American levels in order to include the words, opinions, needs and proposals of children, including those with special abilities and needs, in the construction and implementation of public policies to be executed by the highest authorities.
- Child participation experiences carried out in our countries should be shared.
- The participation of persons with special abilities and needs should be promoted.
- Suitable public areas should be developed for the participation of all children, contributing to recreation, culture, play and self-expression/communication.
- It is necessary to educate the people who deal with children and raise their awareness of child rights and the promotion of participation.
- The State should provide family aid and develop campaigns using appropriate methodology, in order to promote a more open attitude in parents. They should listen to children and allow them to give their views on subjects that affect them and their families.
- Early stimulation opportunities to foster participation in children of between 0 and 5 years of age should be created or improved.
- Child rights should be included as a school subject and should be taught by means of experiential methodology.

- Employment conditions for adults should be improved and guaranteed, in order to improve the quality of life of their families.
- The number of health care centres and professionals that promote the care of children who are at risk or socially excluded (children living with HIV/AIDS, teenage mothers and teenage drug addicts) should be increased.
- We need guidance programmes on sexual education.
- States must increase investment in education.
- Transport in remote areas should be guaranteed so that children with limited financial resources can attend school.
- Student councils should be formed with the participation of children, parents and members of the community in general.
- Teenage mothers should not be restricted in their right to education.
- We do not want memory-based education, but education based on our experience.
- Food programmes should be broadened and improved and associated with urban, suburban and rural schools.
- Childhood should be a priority in the States' public budgets.
- All forms of corporal and psychological punishment in families, schools and society should be prohibited.
- There are border conflicts which affect the protection of child rights. We recommend halting investment in weapons and promoting peace.
- We adolescents have great interest in supporting the proposals drafted in this Forum, even together with the adolescents who come after us.
- We call upon all authorities to put an end to border conflicts and give priority to children's education, in order to generate a culture of world peace. More schools, fewer weapons.

Llegando al final de nuestra semana de encuentro entre niños, niñas y adolescentes de América, no quisiéramos dejar pasar la oportunidad para agradecer a Perú por el buen trato, a los países asistentes por su compromiso y en especial a las y los adolescentes peruanos que cumplieron la labor de facilitación.

## Passage 4

### THE EXPERIENCE OF THE FIRST PAN AMERICAN CHILD FORUM LIMA, PERU - 2009

It is worth noting that this activity is unprecedented in our region and it reveals both the need and the possibility that is arising in these countries of integrating adolescents into the work spaces and the decision-making on matters of interest to them and which affect them directly.

The experiences lead to different lessons learned that have put our mediators — who are in charge of integrating and preparing these spaces — to the test. We will therefore share the techniques applied in the First Pan American Child Forum, as well as the planning, the rationale and the evaluation of the activity in the words of the participating adolescents.

For this reason we highlight the importance of the FORUM as a methodological challenge, since we had to work with children of heterogeneous cultural levels, with different experiences in organization and different languages.

In this way, the First Forum's activity was not limited to the integration and the personal experiences of the participants, since the products prepared by the adolescents were documents containing their position on relevant aspects of the regional reality.

#### **The working guidelines...**

- *Started by acknowledging that children's experience, knowledge, feelings and practices have a crucial value for promoting legitimate participation processes.*
- *Contributed to the exchange and socialization of the information among the children, which was beneficial for their accepting each other as interlocutors.*
- *Helped establish horizontal relationships between the team of facilitators and the children.*
- *Established approaches, concepts and strategies based on the notion that participation is determined by a series of intercultural, generational and gender-based conditions. They gave special consideration to the fact that the barriers to participation are based on power relationships that restrict children's capabilities as persons and citizens.*

- *Were flexible in that, on one hand, they gave the team of facilitators freedom to work according to their experience and skills; and on the other hand, they enabled rethinking and reconsidering the work strategies based on the suggestions and recommendations made by the organizers and the facilitators.*
- *Did not consider the use of a daily log on cards or notes of what took place in each of the areas. These elements could have provided information about the day-to-day operation of the different workshops or creative activities.*

### **Intervention strategies**

#### **Workshops and plenary sessions**

- *The workshops fostered the exchange of knowledge and experience; the combined work of children from different countries was highlighted by participants as a major success that put into circulation the diversity of feelings, meanings, interests and needs, which promoted individual and group acknowledgement.*
- *The stability and permanence of the group and team of facilitators was noted as a variable planned by the organizers in order to cause a minimum level of anxiety, strengthen the work and allow participants to get to know each other.*
- *By socializing their personal experiences they were able to think, feel and affect in a collective sense. This is a lesson learned and an essential achievement in strengthening participation as a process of relationships, dialogue, consensus and understanding.*
- *The workshops and plenary sessions were the strategies that most encouraged the participation of the children within the framework of a strategy that was neither simulated, nor merely decorative, nor instrumental to the participants' experience.*

#### **Creative activities**

- *These were activities for creation and play, in which participants were able to express themselves using their artistic abilities. They promoted the visibility of the experiences that took place every day and/or the feelings, opinions, expectations, desires and challenges generated by the Forum.*
- *While the workshops focused on the written and spoken word, these creative activities complemented them by encouraging participants to express themselves by means of other languages, communicating the meaning of their experiences through their capacity to create and play.*

## **Congresillo**

- *The Congresillo reaffirmed the process of leadership, representativity and legitimacy which was fostered during the event. It was able to reaffirm the participants' democratic abilities and attitudes for debate and consensus, based on respect for others, the validity of their words and the capacity to listen to each other.*
- *The format of the Congresillo was a significantly good decision. The children appropriated the event and transformed it into one of the most representative activities in terms of their participation. This was possible because of the previous "training" they had received in group work and plenary sessions.*
- *The self-organization of the Congresillo and the role of adults basically as observers were central elements in achieving an event which was fully validated by all those involved in the Forum.*
- *The election of representatives by country was essential in order to strengthen and foster the fact that the Congresillo was legitimized in its representational process.*

A climate of child leadership was fostered, in which a general feeling prevailed that the papers submitted to the Twentieth Congress should respond to the feelings, expectations, needs and interests proposed by the children as central focal points.

....

The *Congresillo* was highlighted as the most successful participatory event. Both children and adults fully agreed that this was one of the Forum's most noteworthy methodological strategies, which enabled reaching consensus and agreements on the basis of the adolescents' capacity to name representatives, as a genuine exercise in democracy and trust, engaging in respectful dialogue which strengthened and reaffirmed that participation is learned by participating.

The children pointed out that the *Congresillo* was one of the activities that they "liked" most, because it lived up to their expectations in terms of participation, leadership and autonomy. Prolonged discussions were held, mainly owing to the complexity of the problem addressed and the efforts to reach agreements and arrive at conclusions in a participatory manner.

*"I liked it very much, it's what I liked best, it all should have been like that... perhaps the group work could have been like that: we facilitated, we did the writing ourselves and we reached agreements..." Adolescent male, 17.*

*"I thought the Congresillo was very good because we would spend about half an hour over a phrase and not finish it, because some of us had certain opinions and others had different ones; I saw that there was a lot of participation". Adolescent female, 16.*

*"We ourselves arrived at conclusions and agreements". Adolescent female, 16.*

Finally, it should be noted that the self-organization of this event was based on the work promoted and achieved during the workshops and plenary sessions, thus completing the participation exercise. We consider that the *Congresillo* would not have been possible without previously having fostered processes of interlocution, collective work and representative legitimacy in the workshops.

### **Creative activities**

These activities were planned for recreation and play: the children were able to express themselves using their artistic abilities. The idea behind this format was to give the participants opportunities for entertainment and creation.

A team of facilitators specialized in the artistic areas planned for the participants' work was available.

The processes were the following:

#### **1. *'We express and inform ourselves' (audiovisual):***

Interviews were conducted with the children with regard to their participation experience at the Forum, their opinions about their activities and about the issues addressed every day. It was the children themselves who interviewed, recorded, filmed and carried out the technical work. The facilitators' role was to provide sympathetic and friendly advice.

This experience was highlighted as very interesting and innovative, since it engaged children as producers of the films and interviews, and as the persons being interviewed. A participation experience took place which definitely contributed to achieving protagonist and effective participation.

*'I loved doing the interviews, then watching, revising what we were doing. One of us handled the camera, another the cables, another did the interviews... Excellent! As well as publicizing the experiences on the video film, we also learned to produce films! Fantastic!' Adolescent team member.*

*'It was a lot of fun and very agreeable.'* Adolescent male, 16.

*'It was great, it was fun: this is a different way of working on the issues. I think I'm good at art work.'* Adolescent female, 16.

At the end of the event the films were presented to all those attending.

## **2. 'Our gaze builds the future' (photography).**

The work focused on the participants photographing themselves and their peers during the activities in which they participated during the Forum.

The participants pointed out that they would have preferred taking photographs of other children in the streets, schools or other organizations of the country.

*'We went around taking pictures, but perhaps I would have liked it if we hadn't only taken pictures here, but in the open: homeless children working, children involved in sport; if we'd gone outside.'* Adolescent female, 16.

*'It was very good, but if it had been in the open air, like a park, the participation with photographs would have been better. Yes, in more open places, because those issues don't only happen here; I don't know, perhaps some children playing, to go and take a picture of them.'* Adolescent female, 16.

The final product was the presentation of a mural in which the contour of a child was outlined with all the photographs taken.

## **3. 'When we express our ideas through an aerosol' (graffiti).**

Participants drew and wrote on a large piece of cloth about topics related to their experiences. In general, expectations with regard to this creative activity were not fulfilled. Participants had hoped to learn about, or to work with graffiti in different areas, larger and more in keeping with their urban and public significance.

*'I thought we were going to go out in the street to present something related to the Forum. Besides, I wanted to learn, to play with the aerosol, and that wasn't possible in here...'* Adolescent member of the work team.

#### **4. 'Our bodies express themselves and build' (self-expression through movement).**

This activity fostered development, relaxation and interaction amongst children, through the movements of their bodies.

*'I thought we were going to act out the situation... for example, how the children's lives are, I expected something like that... I would recommend that they provide a detailed explanation of what this will be... I expected to be taught acting techniques.'* Adolescent male, 17.

*'Very good activity: I relaxed a lot; I wasn't at all bored, and I was very happy with the friends I met.'* Adolescent female, 17.

In general, the creative activities allowed the children to indulge in some entertainment and to have a chance to express themselves through techniques they were interested in and which encouraged greater freedom of movement. They chose the subjects to work on themselves; they decided on the techniques or strategies to use, chose their resources or materials, etc. All these forms of work strengthened the participation proposal.

Some participants were slightly dissatisfied because the instructions provided before signing up for the activity were not clear and, in any case, they did not have the information they needed to choose the creative activity most suited to their interests.

Another important opinion, also shared by some of the adults, was that the creative activities were not pertinent to the central topics of the Forum. In any case, some of the facilitators of these activities did not bear in mind the need for this consistency, although the general guidelines recommended working on the basis of the expectations mentioned by the children on the first day of the Forum.

One of the suggestions made in the daily evaluation spaces was the possibility of using the creative activities as the recreational expression of the content of the workshops.



It would be important to enhance the creative activities, linking them directly with the topics that come up in the workshops and plenary sessions; concentrating on the issues that attract most attention or on new or hidden problems, or the more common ones, or cases of successful participation, etc. That is, creating a stronger connection between the learning process in the workshops and the recreational creative activities.<sup>17</sup> ...

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<sup>17</sup> IIN-OAS (2010) Report on the experience of child participation in the First Pan American Child Forum.

## **APPENDIX 2. LIST OF SUGGESTED LINKS CONTAINING VALUABLE INFORMATION**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLV6jaZFLro&feature=related>

Speech by Severn Suzuki, representative of ECO (Environmental Children’s Organization) to the delegates of the States Party of the United Nations.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHBicv6r3eM&NR=1>

Footage on the rights and duties of children, by Mafalda.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDuKaszJj0w>

31 Minutos TV Show: Calceñ con Rombos Man: Buscando identidad (Searching for Identity)

<http://www.larimbombanda.com/>

Official site of the children’s musical group La Rimbombanda, in the town of San Marcos de la Sierra, Córdoba, Argentina.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EutD5\\_CHbjM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EutD5_CHbjM)

La Rimbombanda, La Batuta (The Baton)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mS1nEj9cDcE>

31 Minutos TV Show: Calceñ con Rombos Man: Los mocasines sin usar (The Unused Shoes)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33VYndCap3c&feature=related>

31 Minutos TV Show: Calceñ con Rombos Man: Ser diferente (Being Different)

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