



## Theoretical positions on children's participation

### AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

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I'd like to say hello to Ravit. Ravit, would you mind introducing yourself and tell us a little bit about yourself? Hi. Hello. Thank you. Yes. So, I'm a lecturer at the University of Haifa in Israel, and I used to work in the field with children and young people at high risk.

Today, I'm more involved in interventions that happen online and with young people through chat that we operate, and it allows us to communicate with young people. And in terms of research, my research topic is decision making and risk assessment around child protection and a core issue in terms of this topic is also how children can participate in decision making.

So yeah, yeah. I mean, it's an interesting topic around decision making and risk assessment and children's participation and that I know that in the UK, for example, one of the things that social workers have been criticized for in serious case reviews is the fact that we don't often hear or listen to the voice of the child that well.

So that's a big issue. And can I also say that it's also an issue in research as well, because if we don't involve children in research then it's another way of not hearing that voice. I'm a part of the COST organization in Europe and we are now working on a book which will all dedicated to children's participation in research.

It's about children and child abuse survivors, participation in child treatment research, principle tactics and methods. And we'll deal with specific examples from different countries in Europe about how children are involved in research. So I just wanted to add that extra bit. And as well, it is challenging in research very much as well. Yes. Yes. I mean, some of the issues that I have been reading about, about children being involved in research, which is quite interesting, is that sometimes when we talk about children's participation, we talk about it from an adult point of view.

And even in research, when we talk about when we do research on children's participation, quite often we don't involve children in the research itself, but yet in all we talk about the importance of children's participation. I'm sure your book will be quite valuable in adding to our understanding of that. And I and I must admit that I myself, kind of in my research, avoid approaching children.

I did research of that. She had been brought to case conferences and I kind of I avoided speaking directly to them. And again, I think that leads me to the issue that you mentioned that you discussed before about. I think it's more about values, perceptions, cultural atmosphere and and what kind of the theory you have in mind about children's participation.

And I must admit that I did a lot of learning and had to change my mind. And so, yeah. Esther, what's your view on this? Yeah, I think that in our Panda project we are having the same issues of how is it possible to involve children under 12. I feel that these are big challenges for the professionals and practitioners, and we would like to know about your experiences.

How is the most important or useful for the professionals to involve them? Because when we are talking about the participation in decision making, I think that as professionals, we don't have any problem to involve the children, the young people, okay, because we are thinking that maybe the right is something or the right is possible to do and it is possible to communicate more and to know the concerns, and the desires.

But what happened with the children under 12 years, what happened with the professional and what happened in our context with the law? Because in all countries we have more or less the same law and the convention. But these are big challenges for the professionals. Okay, So it's true that maybe we have the theoretical, the values and this kind of the perspective, but in fact, we have to work with children under 12.

We have a lot of challenges for the professional. So, talking about this, we like to know Ravit, with your experiences or maybe you can give us some advice or how can we promote the participation of the children under 12 and of course, in your experiences, in your organization.

I know that it's it seems that it's easier with young people. But again, I think that there are different levels of participation. Some of them are not really participation. And more about, I don't know, some kind of engagement or involvement and something that I found in my study was that and not meaningful participation did more harm than good because it made young people shut themselves down and they were like afterwards disconnected and they didn't want any anyone to approach them.

So in a way it was kind of tokenistic, when it was not meaningful, and so it did more harm than good. So I think this is something that we need to think about as well, because they want to be respected. And sometimes we think that we participate. We allow them to participate, but they are not well respected as as adults.

So this is an issue. And, in terms of young people, I think it was, as I was reading through your and theoretical understanding, I think it's this is what I found a lot about.

How do you understand childhood and in the field of child protection? I think it's very meaningful. And it's also having the desire to protect the child and this is what I saw as a key aspect when in practice, the issue of understanding and accepting children's rights as rightful human beings.

And I think that this is something that made a change, or only letting them be involved in a very instrumental way to some kind of an understanding that this is a basic human right and this is their right. Because sometimes you hear things like social workers kind of wanting to protect the child, and then you say to yourself, But this is the reality he's living in.

You don't need to spare him the details of his reality. And, you know, so you can steal things from the child. You don't want him to participate in the forum that describes their life because you think it will trouble then. But then again, it's their life. And so there's a lot of values involved, moral values. And I think it's not that easy.

And it goes to the understanding of childhood. I think this is and something that I think which is very crucial. Yeah. That the sociology of childhood to me is a really valuable way of understanding our approach and attitude towards children. It's I mean, lots and lots of adults and lots and lots of social workers still see childhood as something less than adulthood.

So if you're not an adult, you're not an adult. You're still something which is less than. But if you see children as less than in some way deficient and some way incompetent and some way not as sensible as adults, there's always going to be the danger that you will not involve children and decisions that affect them.

But one of the things that strikes me about the theory of the sociology of childhood is that in some ways, if you understand, if you take that theory to its extreme and it's something that can facilitate the abuse of children, because if you see children as less than not as important as it in some ways enables you to treat them less well than you would an older adult.

So if, say, for example, I think a children is less important that, in some ways enables me, emboldens me, to facilitate me to hurt that child because it's just a child. What's the big deal? I really think that the sociology of childhood, that theory is incredibly important for social workers to really understand. And as well, when we're thinking about decision making and assessments, if you don't value the voice of the child, you're less likely to involve the child in decisions, you're less likely to involve the child and assessments.

And what we know from research is that the less children are involved, the less well developed are their protection plans, the less well we understand the world from their perspective, and it becomes an adult centric service. Yeah, I totally agree. And I know when I was talking about decision making, but if you look at the on-going contact of social workers with the family.

So I'm saying things that where I found quite a while ago and I really hope that the situation is changed but I heard a lot of social workers saying, yeah, I saw the child. You saw him. And it was mainly seeing it was not talking to, so they could see him in a home visit. you seen him in some kind of a committee in school.

But it wasn't talking was basically literally seeing the child. And if I can pick up on what you mentioned, I think there's a nice model that tries to expand like an ecological perspective and a frame thing what you mentioned. So we need to see how children are and could not be acknowledge or valued. Not like we can start in the family, we can start at school, we can, and we can go on and on and on, you know, like in the circles that the school system and see how it's is in our community and in the culture.

So and I think that this is a very wider perspective that we need to think about because the interaction between the social worker and the families just the beginning and there's a lot of context around them. And I don't know when I read the theories, I was thinking that what if something will change now in terms of technology, you know, that kids are mastering technology better than adults and maybe we can have some kind of a change here.

Like I certainly run and ask my kids for help in anything. And it goes around in my computer. So maybe it will be some kind of change that allows us to better appreciate them and as adults. And so it's a good thought after you're interested in an ecological and systemic approach as well.

Yes, of course. I think that for my personal perspective, when I work with families and children as well, is you can focus on all other perspectives after or before. Okay. Because it's not only to try to assess what happened inside the family, what happened around the family, what happened in other countries that the children are involved. We need I feel that the professional, the social worker, the practitioner need to know other contexts, that the children are involved, and the families are involved and to hear what happened in other contexts because I think that we are working with an open theoretical model, you open your mind that we are working with children and of course

the way that you create this kind of the relationship or the communication what's important is, okay, maybe I can see the children, I can see the family, but maybe I never ask about quality of thinking about this or your concert or your book. So I think it's very, very important to incorporate this kind of the I thing not only just one theoretical or one approach, a lot of theoretical approach's that the school made more available to the practitioners or how the parties are working with the families and to evaluate what were real, what happened, and incorporate the children in this social making.

And of course, I think that this kind of the theoretical, the process is more open to evaluate all of their context that maybe sometimes we are very, very focused on the children and in a small context, but the children is more that the family context, I think as well that, you know, listening to both of you on a theory of recognition can play quite an important part here because we have to recognize children for who they are, recognize them as us as rights holders.

It's not that we give rights to children, it's that we are recognizing that children are rights bearers and themselves, not by virtue of the fact that we have given them rights. It's by the virtue of the fact that they are entitled to rights. The same way that adults are. So Honneth. It seems to be about recognizing the importance of children deserving of love, recognition, support, respect and all aspects of both social work, education, health, society, but recognizing the value of children and recognizing the value of childhood.

Because I know from myself and really you've said about, you know, your children helping you with the computer. I know that I have learned lots from my children themselves. So it's not that I am the adult and I teach children or I impart my knowledge, children are affecting me as well. They are imparting knowledge to me and I think that recognition as reciprocal.

When that reciprocity happens, it's a wonderful thing for children and adults together. Yeah, I totally agree. And if I can add to it, I think that theory can help us in terms of reflecting on our practice. We can look at participation on a spectrum and maybe levels.

I'm not sure the way you want to visualize it, but we can use theory in order to ask ourselves, okay, what are we doing? Like, I really like the Lundy model of space, voice, influence and audience so we can look at the practice and say, okay, maybe I have given the child a space to speak.

I may set a meeting together with the children, but then I need to ask myself, was he allowed, or she allowed Voice Were they allowed influence? What were they like really? And real audience? So I think that theory can help us reflect and see what are we doing and what kind, what level of participation we are allowing.

And so I think it's good to have theoretical concepts in mind. Yeah, Yeah. As so what's your, what's your opinion. Yeah, I totally agree with Ravit. Okay. For me sometimes we are talking about this theoretical. Okay, I think that I would like to separate more philosophical, and theoretical that we have to keep in mind because I think it's a combination of both.

Okay. But we're talking about the wholeness approach I think is more philosophical that we have to keep in mind. But how is possible to cross or how is possible to work with these ideas in the practice? Okay. Because it is true that we are thinking in these. Okay, but how is something of value for the professional and when I working with the social process of integration.

Okay. So I think that I totally agree that this kind of this perspective is really, really interesting for the professionals to keep in mind. But the more challenges is how we can incorporate in our practice. The institutions, your background, your or other colleagues, the children's, the families.

Okay. So yeah, and for me, I would like to ask Ravit and you Paul as well to talk more about how we can incorporate this or what is the most important thing or value in the practice of the Social work or in your personal and professional perspective, What kind of the approach or the theoretical model can help the professionals to involve the children in participation making?

Yeah, I mean, I probably agree with you, Esther Honneth is very philosophical. One of the ones that for me the theory for me that has got quite a lot of application to practice is Bourdieu. So take for example, a case conference. Bourdieu talks about having capital, how much, how much capital you have will will dictate how much influence you have.

So if we as professionals have got a lot of capital, we know the system, we know the law, we know the policies and procedures. We know the language of child protection. That gives us a lot of capital, a lot of power in the case conference, children and in our society, children don't have a lot of capital. They don't have a lot of power.

And the danger in the case conference scenario or in an assessment scenario or in a decision-making scenario, the voice of the child is ignored because they don't have power, they don't have influence. And I think if we embrace that idea of Bourdieu, that sense of capital, of habitus, of status, it can really help. It can really help our practice because it makes us more sensitive to the power structures.

Yeah, I totally agree. I totally agree. And yeah, there is something about you know, I did some research about and multi professional work and multidisciplinary work and also I can see that there are some professions who really hold their power, it's not so much about democracy, it's more about certain professions and making the decision so yeah so it's much more and there's another step to go in terms of allowing children the power.

This is the solution; this is the answer. We need them involved. We need and we need to follow what they think. And otherwise, it's not going to work. And I think that this is something that can make a change in our perception and in allowing them the power and the rightful power to make decisions about their lives.

So I totally agree. And really, that is an excellent way for us to end our podcast on, because we've talked about the theory, and we have talked about the application of theory and your summary about it's important that's absolutely critical that children are involved. It's their right to be involved is a really good way to end our podcast.

I would just like to say Ravit and Esther, thank you both very much for contributing freely to the podcast, for sharing your ideas, and for talking openly about what you think about theory, because sometimes it can be a little bit hard to get our heads around theory. But when we've talked altogether, I think we have made some in roads into shedding some light on how the theories can be understood.

But as Esther says, the important thing about theory is that we apply it to practice. So, guys, thank you very much. I'm going to stop the recording now.

