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INTERNATIONAL  
**CHILD**  
PROTECTION  
NETWORK  
OF CANADA

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**FACILITATING CHILD PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL CHILD PROTECTION**  
**OCTOBER 5-6, 2015**  
**RYERSON UNIVERSITY, CANADA**

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## Conference Summary

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 With notes from Nick Petten

### *Introduction*

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*Facilitating Child Participation in International Child Protection* took place at Ryerson University in Toronto on October 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The conference brought together about 60 individuals from around the world, representing various government departments, non-profit organizations, youth and academic institutions. (See Appendix C on p. 28 for list of participants.) The conference was chiefly funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant and coordinated by the Child Participation Working Group of the International Child Protection Network of Canada. The event would not have been possible without the generous, invaluable support of numerous organizations and individuals identified in Appendix D (p. 30).

The goal of the event was to explore crucial issues at the intersection of child participation and child protection, share current practices and lessons learned, and identify key research and advocacy priorities for moving the field forward. The first day was dedicated to ethical, legal, and political tensions and priorities, while the second day focused on practical tensions and priorities, global trends affecting the field, and important areas of action emerging from this constellation of factors. A smaller group of conference participants began planning to follow up on conference outcomes on October 7 as described in a separate document.

Youth participation was a critical component of the conference: a youth workshop was held on October 4<sup>th</sup>, where youth discussed the central questions of the conference to prepare their contributions to the event. Over the course of the following two days, youth played an active role in the presentations and discussions. A report of the youth workshop is also available.

Please refer to the conference program in Appendix B (p. 23) for the organization of the two days and identification of the various speakers. See videos of plenary presentations at <http://icpnc.org/2015/11/10/facilitating-child-participation-in-child-protection-video-recording/> and conference papers and presentation files at <http://icpnc.org/publications-and-resources/conference-on-child-participation-and-child-protection-resources/>

It is important to note that the information summarized below reflects the diversity of views and discussions that unfolded over the course of the conference. The statements herein are not intended as final, absolute, or unanimous pronouncements on the complex issues involved in child participation and child protection. (Key conference terms are defined in Appendix A, p. 21.)

## DAY ONE – October 5, 2015

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### *Definition of participation*

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#### **Respect**

- Children are not instruments for others' interests. Often, especially in a protection context, they are cast in a certain role (e.g. victims, survivors). Children do have special needs and face unique challenges, but they should not be conflated with those needs or reduced to those challenges. They are more than that.
- The child must be respected as a person, an individual with dignity and aspirations. We must cultivate this respect for children at all stages of their lives.
- We often focus on the maturity of the child, but what about the maturity of the adult in engaging with that child? The onus is not on children to meet the standards of adults, but on adults to learn how to hear, understand, and be in dialogue with children.
- Participation comes in many forms; an infant's cries are a form of participation. It is important to participate with the head and heart, to value feelings as well as ideas.
- There needs to be a balance between an adult's respect and responsibility for the child.
- Honesty and respect are intertwined. A critical part of working with children is self-reflection; one needs to be honest with oneself before one can be honest with others.
- Participation does not have to be a solemn endeavour. Children do not want to talk only about issues; they can be serious and have fun. It is important to loosen up!

#### **Power**

- Participation creates certain experiences and opportunities for children, but is it always empowering?
- There is a balance of power between children and their parents/caregivers. At the end of the day, the children we work with go home to their families, where some of these ideas can be seen as threatening. Participation work needs to involve parents/caregivers too.
- Among adults, there is a common view of youth as problematic and threatening; this power dynamic is also important to consider.
- Adults have power. Reduce the load of adults when encouraging children's participation.
- Children are the experts in defining and affecting their worlds; only the individual can fully understand himself/herself.

- Everyone is powerful. You are limited by what you are told you can accomplish. The greatest barrier to participation is thinking you are limited.

### Process

- There are certain prerequisites for participation: children's desire and motivation to participate, resources and platforms for participation, and adults' willingness to listen to, engage with, and act on children's views.
- Participation is a multi-step endeavour, in which the child's experience can be the starting point (cf. Equitas, Right to Play). Children share their experience, reflect on this experience, connect it to other experiences in their lives, and envision how this can be acted upon and applied to different situations.
- Rights education is a crucial component of participation.
- In a protection context, children have often experienced trauma. Don't re-traumatize children when soliciting their participation.
- Participation presents opportunities for children to express themselves, learn from adults, contribute to positive change, and connect with other children.

### Context

- Approach participation from an intersectional perspective: be aware of the influence of gender, ethnicity, ability, class, language, culture, location, etc. and how this informs children's experiences.
- Children are members of communities. Foster connections and support in the community while building capacity in the community.
- Consider the contextual realities of each region/country.
- Participation must be informed by a long-term vision: given the context in which it unfolds, how can participatory work be sustained in the future?
- We want to remove barriers to participation, but in a way that takes their context into account. We want to enable aspirations, but not engender false hopes that are impossible to realize under the circumstances.
- Try to understand what the existing system offers children and see what can be learned from that.

*Looking at this from a rights perspective, all rights are linked. It's not this or that; participation and protection are connected, they are indivisible.*



### *Ethical tensions*

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#### **Understanding social context and systemic limitations: Working children in India**

- Children cannot be viewed separately from their families and communities. There are hierarchies within these communities and within societies more broadly that place children at a disadvantage (e.g. generational discrimination).
- For children living in poverty or other conditions of hardship, it is a struggle just to survive, let alone exert their agency/right to participate.
- Without the mechanisms to hold institutions and governments to account, children must depend on adult advocates. Moreover, there is a dearth of role models to validate and demonstrate agency/participation for children.
- Working children have no input into how they are ‘protected’. Often this protection is provided at the expense of their other rights.
- Children’s participation can have negative repercussions, arising both from the people around them and from tensions within themselves (e.g. exercising their right to participate can place their individual interests above the collective interests of their families and communities, which they believe is wrong).
- Among child-serving organizations, children’s agency/participation is poorly conceptualized, supported, and monitored. Operations are driven by the priorities of the funders rather than the children. Child-led organizations are similarly limited by their dependence on outside bodies for funding.

*Children are participating in spite (not because) of us.*

#### **Interrogating our assumptions: Child marriage in Zambia**

- Normative assumptions guide most of the decisions we make around the worst things that can happen to children. We assume that a refugee camp is better than a war zone, that going to school, any school, is better than not going to school. What about child marriage? Is it the worst outcome for a child?
- Boys, girls, and their families in Zambia are aware of the risks involved in child marriage, but they see benefits to it as well. Children and adults describe it as a way to escape an abusive home, to get out of poverty, to gain respect in the community, and to engage in a socially sanctioned sexual relationship.
- The issue is not marriage itself, but its structural underpinnings, such as the social and economic inequalities that make marriage seem like a child’s best option.
- Efforts to sensitize communities to the negative effects of child marriage are not helping; rather they are doing harm, because ‘child marriage-free’ communities push the practice underground to meet their public commitment to this ideal.
- The opportunity for self-reflection doesn’t always happen in child protection and participation work. Even if we are operating from the best intentions, we need to examine where those intentions are coming from.

*If young people say something different from what the research is saying,  
you have to listen to them.*

### Considering the role of child development: Street children in Brazil

- Those working in child protection have rules and policies to contend with; this is problematic when the work we do becomes about applying policies rather than about serving individual children.
- In programs for street children in Brazil, the workers were responding to real children: every child had a name and a developmental trajectory for the adults who worked with them.
- We need to make child protection the servant of child development. We need to do more with CRC Article 27 (the right to an adequate standard of living) in calling on society to create a sufficient and suitable living space for children.
- Development work includes making space for children to participate. When we don't create that space, children make it themselves. We need to be respectful and back off when we are not helping them do that.

*We create as many problems as we solve.*

### Balancing ethical imperatives: Critical tensions

*Individuality & collectivity:* Considering how the rights, roles, and best interests of the child and the caregivers/family can align, clash, and intersect.

*Agency & responsibility:* Questioning what weight is given to the child's evolving capacity relative to the adult's duty of care.

*Self-determination & legislative regulation:* Reconciling children's participation rights and how this informs what they want with legal frameworks designed to protect children from being forced into something they don't want.

*Vulnerability & resilience:* Acknowledging that children in certain situations have certain needs without compartmentalizing them according to those needs.

*Quantity & quality:* Providing an impactful quantity of services without sacrificing quality and individual-oriented attention.

*Institutional knowledge & lived experience:* Exploring the applicability and utility of 'best practices' and evidence-based intervention to the daily lives of individuals and communities.

*Pragmatism & idealism:* Navigating the fiscal and political demands of institutions while honouring the principles of children's rights.

*Is children's rights a movement or a service industry?*

## Legal tensions

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### Children's legal personality

- Legal personality is the recognition of the individual as a holder of rights and responsibilities, while legal capacity is the ability to act on those rights and obligations.
- In practice, these legal statuses are applied to children through the filter of age-based competence; as a result, children are often seen as not having ownership or control over their rights.
- In addition, under the law, children are subject to notions of welfare-based competence, wherein they are seen as vulnerable and dependent. But what about children who do not fit that description? What happens when they are doing the 'wrong' thing (e.g. working children, children in armed conflict, children in crime) or occupying the 'wrong' place (e.g. street children, traveler children)?
- In both cases, because of either their vulnerable condition or their problematic status, children are at risk of having their participation rights challenged.

### Contradictory notions of children in domestic legislation: South Africa

- International rights instruments cover a broad spectrum of rights that are viewed as interdependent; this does not coherently translate into domestic law.
- South Africa's Children's Act explicitly addresses children's rights within a framework of best interests. The Act emphasizes the child's evolving capacities and how these capacities can be brought to bear on decisions affecting the child. Children are therefore viewed as fundamentally competent, while needing varying levels of support. The Act was informed by extensive consultation with children.
- South Africa's Sexual Offence Act, while also using a child rights lens, focuses on protecting children from exploitation. The Act criminalizes sex below the age of 16, categorizing children as either victims needing protection or delinquents needing correction. Children were not consulted in the writing of this Act.
- These conflicting depictions of children leave health service providers in a difficult position: do they consider the children's evolving capacities or do they identify them as victims or perpetrators? Ultimately, the consequences of not reporting under the Sexual Offence Act deter them from providing any services to children at all.

*Service providers are  
most impacted by local legislation,  
not the shining examples  
set by UN treaties.*



## Testing legal channels: Critical tensions

### *Macro vs. micro*

- Effectiveness of international law in affecting domestic law
- Conflicts between national law and regional law
- Sensitivity of the international community to the real issues for children on the ground

### *On paper vs. in practice*

- Developing standards and laws without being able to enforce them
- Implementation of laws, which can be open to interpretation and applied very loosely

### *Top-down vs. bottom-up*

- Punitive/criminal approaches to protection in conflict with agency and rights
- Age criteria for measuring evolving capacities
- Tension between adult's notions and children's views (adults imposing laws that are not useful in terms of children's priorities)
- Lack of complaint mechanisms for children to discuss their participation (or lack thereof)

## *Political tensions*

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### **Violence in the streets: Children at the intersection of punitive politics and social inequality in Brazil**

- What happens when we don't listen to children? What happens when we let matters get to a point of such anger and deep inequality between different groups?
- Street children in Brazil are children who do not fit in their homes, communities, schools. They are out there, not conforming, and this disturbs others, to the point where these children are met with anger, violence, and dehumanization.
- At the same time, there are recent waves of violence perpetrated by children in the streets. Children from the favelas are convening by the hundreds and robbing and attacking people. White, middle-class children are forming militias and assaulting, sometimes killing, other children whom they see as different from themselves.
- We need more effective strategies for promoting democratic process and avoiding punitive approaches, for swaying public opinion, for navigating the relationship between the government and the advocacy community.
- We must not underestimate the importance of the political climate in creating space for us as academics, researchers, and advocates to create space for children. We must not forget the child in the process of all this political upheaval.

*We need to be keener about politics, because it affects a lot of what happens to people in general and young people in particular.*

*We need to be in those spheres where decisions are made.*

### **Bolivia's working children: Children's voices, national legislation, and international expectations**

- In Bolivia, one in four children between the ages of 5 and 14 work. Some of these children formed a union (UNATSBO) to help protect themselves from harm and exploitation; the union has 15,000 members.
- UNATSBO had been negotiating with the Bolivian government to make changes to child labour legislation, such as abolishing the minimum age for independent, non-salaried work. When these changes did not come through, children protested.
- The government's harsh response to the protest caused an international outcry, leading the president to meet with UNATSBO representatives. The law was revised to accommodate some of the children's demands, but these modifications again attracted international condemnation for supposedly putting working children at greater risk.
- While the children believe they have achieved positive change, the international community believes the children's well-being has been jeopardized.

### **Navigating political currents: Critical tensions**

#### *International & national*

- Tension between the international community (which is pushing an ideology of modernity) and national constituencies (which are resisting the imposition of international norms)

#### *Agendas & agency*

- When children's priorities and perspectives conflict with the advocacy agenda of the international/policy community
- The rights agenda and the political/security agenda
- Decision makers utilizing child participation to realize their agendas, opening up new forms of tokenism, manipulation, and abuse
- Children are not recognized as political constituents/agents; there is a disconnect between their roles as passive recipients of services and as rights holders/active stakeholders
- New and emerging parties are not included in the decision-making process.
- How to be apolitical yet effectively engage with processes that are political

#### *Shifts & shortfalls*

- Lack of political will to engage children
- Lack of courage and agency to defend children
- Lack of accountability to evidence and lack of accountability to children
- Shrinking spaces for civil society (including children) to participate
- Need for new strategies that are inter-sectorial

## *Priorities for Action*

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### **Ethical**

1. Voice
  - a. Identify who has a voice in discussing, shaping, and implementing policies and programs. Question who has the authority to make the final decisions.
  - b. Explore the power of individual and collective voices. Be aware of the depth of engagement and outcomes of engagement for different groups.
  - c. Recognize the multiplicity of children's voices. There is no one 'pure' or 'real' voice.
2. Motive
  - a. Examine the values and belief systems guiding the work.
  - b. Be transparent about the opportunities and limitations presented by participation.
  - c. Expose the underlying personal, political, institutional, and financial agendas.
  - d. Promote understanding of and respect for diversity and dialogue.
3. Context
  - a. Approach child participation as a relational exercise, embedded within the child's family, school, community, etc.
  - b. Give children access to information so that they have a comprehensive understanding of the situation and context they are in.
  - c. Support skills development for both children and adults, so that children are equipped to navigate participatory processes and adults have the skills to assist children.

### **Legal**

1. Implementation
  - a. Recognize that individual children have legal status.
  - b. Require governments/NGOs to consult children before developing laws/policies and to present the final products back to children.
  - c. Evaluate, together with children, existing laws/policies to guide implementation.
2. Influence
  - a. Prevent the powerful from being the sole arbiters of rights.
  - b. Be prepared for the pushback against rights advocacy.
  - c. Be wary of directives to reach broad consensus on issues affecting children, as this dilutes rights and glosses over important differences.
3. Opportunity
  - a. Ensure that children are aware of the range of possibilities open to them, related to participation specifically and to their lives more generally.
  - b. Acknowledge the voices of individual children within NGO programs.
  - c. Remember that change takes time.

### **Political**

1. Mobilization
  - a. Campaign to lower the voting age (harnessing social media).
  - b. Call for more engagement from governments around child participation and sensitize decision-makers to move beyond tokenism.

- c. Put a mechanism/architecture in place to ensure meaningful participation and accountability in political processes (e.g. children's commissioner).
- d. Allow NGOs to be political rather than depoliticized.
- e. Use the Third Optional Protocol to the CRC as a tool for group complaints.

2. Collaboration

- a. Improve coordination between government, civil society, and NGOs to increase child participation.
- b. Match up local, national, and international efforts.
- c. Respect and work with the ways children are organizing and claiming spaces, including acknowledging the anger and frustration driving many groups of children (especially the marginalized).

3. Transparency

- a. Be clear about our organizations' own political connections and limitations.
- b. Use child participation indicators that reflect process as well as outcome.
- c. Use tools like randomized control trials and linear monitoring to demonstrate impact.

4. Ideology

- a. Recognize the impact of political agendas (like the politics of security/terrorism/fear) on NGOs/civil society and on children themselves.



## DAY TWO – October 6, 2015

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### *Practical tensions*

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#### **Participation is not predictable: Getting institutions unstuck**

- Doug Reeler's three-fold theory of social change distinguishes between projectable change (occurs within a stable system with predictable outcomes), emergent change (unfolds through the lessons learned from lived experience), and transformative change (arises at points of crisis when stagnant forms of knowing and being must be unlearned).<sup>1</sup>
- Child-serving organizations follow projectable trajectories of change because they operate within the fiscal constraints set by donors and the hierarchical structure of the NGO/UN community. In such an institutional environment, child participation is superficial because it must conform to the predictable outcomes of the system.
- Transformative change is needed to re-examine the parameters of participation, so that children can be involved in a truly meaningful and open-ended process.

*This is about engaging with young people to open a way forward,  
being willing to put aside one's expertise,  
put aside one's embeddedness in a series of relations that perpetuate the system.*

#### **Unpacking participation: Monitoring and evaluation**

- Monitoring and evaluation initiatives inspect State compliance with CRC provisions and actual participation on the ground. This is important for holding adults accountable to children and tracking progress towards realization of children's rights.
- When monitoring State compliance, there is difficulty agreeing on what to measure, identifying indicators that are universally applicable, and capturing outcomes that are often qualitative and long-term.
- When monitoring child participation, there are challenges around identifying goals and benchmarks of progress, pinpointing the ingredients and mechanisms of change, incorporating the impact of cultural/social/political context, accommodating the true scope of rights advocacy as a movement, and engaging children in what is, for them, an intimidating process.
- Underpinning all of this is the question of why participation, as a human right, should be made subservient to evidence and deliverables.

*Participation shouldn't be contingent on evidence. You wouldn't consider demanding evidence to support programs assessing the impact of violence on women.  
It's about fundamental respect for the dignity of the person.*

#### **Talking is not enough: Translating conversation into action**

- Children go to so many events where there is only talking. Why is it always a brainstorm scenario? Are people afraid to move forward? Are other things more of a priority? If you

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<sup>1</sup> Reeler, D. (2007). A three-fold theory of social change and implications for practice, planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Available from <http://www.cdra.org.za/threefold-theory-of-social-change.html>.

have a hefty issue, take steps, brainstorm, take more steps, and then brainstorm again. Don't stay stuck in the talking phase.

- Tell children what you are doing. Children hate being left in the dark. If something is being moved forward, like a policy or a program, let children know that something is being done about what matters to them.

*We need to start seeing young people as leaders in their communities and in their lives.*

*There are no youth-led entities that have the capacity to influence policy.*

### ***Practical issues & priorities***

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#### **1. Institutional issues**

Money

- Donor dependency and institutional self-preservation leads to divided loyalties
- Short-term funding creates unrealistic timeframes and prevents continuity
- Fight for 'market share' results in a competitive culture and limits collaboration
- Take-over of child protection field by for-profit corporations

Time

- Short attention spans within organizations
- Short memory in the field as a whole
- A palliative, rather than preventative, approach to protection

Human resources

- Staff turnover slows and fragments program delivery
- Experience of senior management dictates the philosophy and content of services
- Disciplinary background of child rights/participation/protection is often too narrow; need to expand to include fields such as sociology, anthropology, etc.

Organization

- Vision and leadership within institutions
- Institutions create their own reality that differs from children's realities
- Burdensome processes for designing, implementing, and evaluating programs (bureaucracy)
- Organizations need size and scale to have influence, but this can drown out local voices
- NGOs are given a service delivery role, not a partnership role; 'partnership' is often an illusion
- Amalgamation of NGOs is likely to prevent rather than promote child participation

*We need to raise questions about the institutions leading this field.*

*We need to imagine a whole different institutional architecture.*

### Institutional priorities

- How to balance learning and unlearning (incremental and transformative change)
- How to get funding in order to be oppositional and challenge the status quo, rather than be coopted by bigger grants
- Need for an independent ombudsperson system with an accountability mechanism, especially in settings with poor governance
- Need for transparency and honesty in our dealing with children
  - E.g. Need for face-to-face consultation phase before design of project (inception phase)
- Find ways that corporations might advance children's rights and develop good examples of private sector involvement in the field

*How do we change institutions from within?  
How do we support dissenting voices within organizations?*

## 2. Resource issues

### Conceptualization challenge

- Child participation is still confusing for many donors, members of the public, government departments, etc.
- Child protection is hard to quantify and lacks a common language
- The public is overwhelmed by demands on their compassion (crisis fatigue)

### Flow of funding

- Need to leverage national resources (not just perpetuate the North-South dynamic)
- There is more financial support for specific as opposed to systemic initiatives
- Donations from formerly reliable sources are no longer available

### Structure of the sector

- Self-insertion of new actors in the child participation sphere (i.e. private sector)
- Corporate sector is very conservative, tackling only 'fun,' safe initiatives
- Breadth of the non-profit sector is a challenge; no unifying communication strategy or leadership



### Resource priorities

- We need to do a better job in child protection at getting our message across. It is not easily digestible for decision makers or even the general public. There are so many issues in child protection—domestic violence, trafficking—that it's hard to effectively communicate what we're talking about.
- We need to be able to explain the costing implications of child protection. Not that we want to boil it down, there are justice issues at the heart of this, but we need to show the costs of action versus inaction.
- The funding opportunities are moving ahead of the sector. We're stuck in systems change when people are moving to funding specific issues. The private sector and for-profit development organizations are taking the lead. We need resource mobilization for specific initiatives.
- Explore opportunities for getting members of the public involved in crowdfunding, especially young professionals. We need to tap into the individual donor market.
- Learn from instances of positive deviance.

## 3. Social, cultural, and attitudinal issues

### Colonialism

- Historical and ongoing
- Intergenerational trauma
- Paternalism
- Deconstruction of local knowledge
- Desire to protect community culture, practices, values, and information

### Globalization

- Economic indicators driving decision-making
- Power in the hands of the few and widespread disenfranchisement (adults and children alike)
- Mass migration and its negative effects on agency
- Technology and social media as sites of resistance, empowerment, and change

### Gender

- Social attitudes about masculinity/femininity

### Race

- Indigenous populations
- Minority groups

### Generational transformation

- Role of religion in shaping identity and belonging
- Domestic violence and male attitudes
- Corporal punishment for discipline

### Participation

- Multiple definitions of participation
- Privileged forms of participation (e.g. dialogue as a preferred mode of participation)
- Marginalization of young children
- Freedom of expression, assembly, and association by children is questioned and impeded (e.g. harassment and surveillance of child activists)
- Youth as threat to adults and society, especially when they protest

### **Social, cultural, and attitudinal priorities**

- Acknowledging the different cultures around childhood, we need to dismantle prevailing norms and unpack what we mean by 'adult' and 'young person.' Concepts of obedience, discipline, and authority also need to be deconstructed.
- We need to work at different levels—interpersonal, institutional, governmental—to build the political will to move forward.
- We need to experience the child cultures in which we work, including the diversity of children therein.
- Rights education must be included in every curriculum, for children and for the adults who will eventually work with them.

*The really important institutions are the ones that deal with children on a daily basis. If we train the service providers, they will engage differently with children. Rights education is incredibly powerful. Most professionals who deal directly with children don't have a clue.*

*We need to show them that path.*

#### **4. Tokenism**

- Tokenism remains the norm; values are not consistently reflected in practice
- A question of maturity and capacity: Can young children participate? How do we define participation?

### **Priorities for Addressing Tokenism**

- Respect, trust, and transparency should guide the participation process
- Incorporate engagement and child-led initiatives from the initial phases of projects
- Steer away from a blanket approach: one size doesn't fit all. Offer options for participating, but recognize that children may see participation differently and have different ideas about how to participate.
- Actively seek out marginalized groups (e.g. very young children are often excluded)
- Engage children in accessible ways. Make the participation process and outcomes child-friendly (i.e. the language, the format).
- Think outside the box (e.g. conferences are not the only way to participate). Consider participation in its formal but also its informal, day-to-day forms.

*Young people see opportunities that we don't.*

#### **5. Monitoring and evaluation issues**

- Difficulty of holding local governments to account
- Danger of indicators of participation becoming how we define participation
- Children need to be involved in determining indicators, but from which countries and backgrounds and age groups are they selected?
- Monitoring is seen as someone else's responsibility instead of being embedded in the work

### Monitoring and evaluation priorities

- The need for stronger outcome indicators on participation in collaboration with children
  - What is it we are measuring?
  - Is the data collectible?
- Importance of indicators that narrow down definition of participation
- Raising awareness of monitoring and evaluation of participation
- Explore the role of social media as a data collection tool on a wide scale

## 6. Safeguarding issues

- How do we define safeguarding (e.g. 'Do no harm')? What is its relation to protection?
- For some children, participating and putting yourself out there is dangerous, while being passive or a victim is how you survive
- Putting the spotlight on children and their experiences can be re-traumatizing
- There is a lack of education and training around safeguarding (the assumption that anyone can work with children)
- When children claim rights, do they become at risk? Is there risk of giving children too much responsibility?
- Global north invents policy/practice that does not map onto reality in the global south, which is producing its own models of child participation

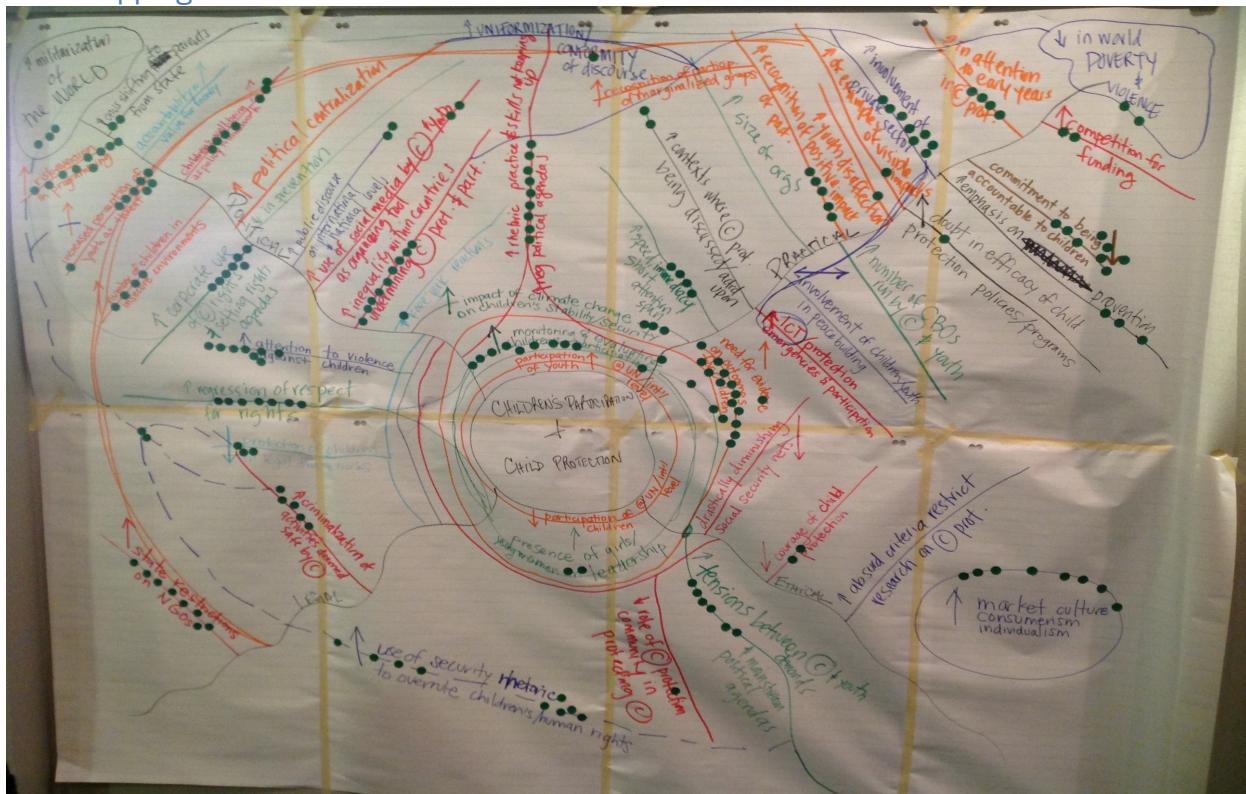


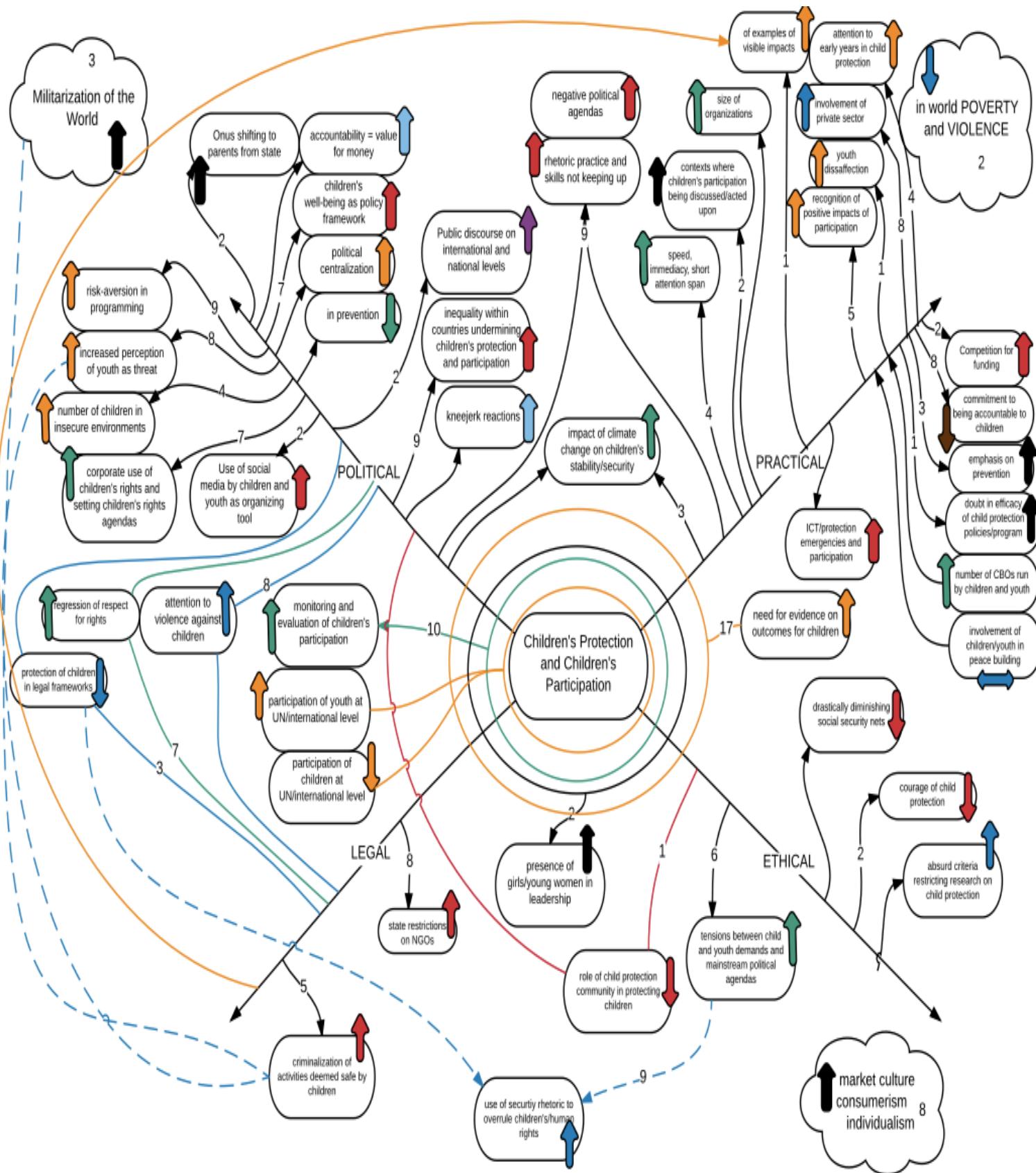
## Safeguarding priorities

- Helping children make informed choices about participation includes going over the attendant risks
- Analyze our personal and institutional biases and preconceived notions about ‘safeguards’; children need to be involved in contextualizing safeguards as well
- Approach each instance of participation as a distinct event, with its own set of risks
- Safeguarding happens at each stage of the participation process
- Listening is important; child participation is deeper than just a child making a decision
- The ‘accountability’ piece of child participation needs to be entrenched
- Where there is tension between the child’s welfare and agency, that is the place where child participation is needed the most. Tension is information. Tension is good. We need skills in managing tension.

When tensions arise between safeguarding and choice, that is where participation needs to happen. If your instinct to manage these tensions is to shut down conversation, that is where participation and dialogue are most important.

## Mindmapping These Trends





## Conference outcomes

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### Recommendations for action

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#### 1. Provide evidence on child participation

- i. *Training*: Equip staff with a minimum set of skills (ongoing education) and tools (capacity-building) in order to gather the evidence.
- ii. *Integrity*: Prioritize transparency, with all actors (especially children) involved in amassing information.
- iii. *Flexibility*: Modify existing or create new frameworks to accommodate and embrace the diversity of evidence around child participation.
- iv. *Innovation*: Pilot new approaches to data collection (e.g. social media).
- v. *Scope*: Conduct longitudinal studies to determine whether interventions have lasting effects.
- vi. *Accessibility*: Publish information that is understandable and interesting to people, including children. Facilitate information sharing across contexts (e.g. local and global, for-profit and non-profit).
- vii. *Accountability*: Always having child-friendly versions of the work that is done (e.g. surveys, studies, events) and provide updates on developments.

#### 2. Target global insecurity and inequality

- i. *Policy*: Provide feedback to governments on all findings around these issues and include ideas for solutions.
- ii. *Prevention*: Invest more resources in exploring prevention issues.
- iii. *Sustainable development*: Work together across sectors and organizations and support children in addressing sustainable development goals.
- iv. *Hope*: Actively combat the culture of fear surrounding youth participation and protest. Provide examples of positive youth mobilization, showing the benefits of youth engagement in promoting policy change.

#### 3. Create more child-friendly spaces

- i. *Holism*: Acknowledge the moral and spiritual aspects of childhood and children, which are often neglected.
- ii. *Awareness*: Push for children's rights in the education system, where it can reach children and those who care and work for them.
- iii. *Curiosity*: Nurture critical thinking, within organizations and the programs they run.
- iv. *Collaboration*: Explore partnership opportunities. Make alliances not with just one organization, but with many.

#### 4. Follow where children lead

- i. *Support*: Capitalize on what children are already doing. Recognize and nurture their leadership and mobilization.
- ii. *Strength*: Move away from problem-oriented language and celebrate the capacity of children.
- iii. *Relevance*: Stay on top of the trends and seize the opportunities that present themselves.
- iv. *Risk*: Innovation is a step into the unknown and this entails risk. Show organizations and funders that risk is part of the process.

*As a community, we have shared values about supporting children,  
but in building that consensus, we've become so introspective.*

*We've got to go out there and work with politicians, the private sector, even if that's hard,  
because yes they're part of the problem but they're also the solution.*

*We're spending too much time talking to each other.*

*We need to be out there to go on effectively supporting children.*

## APPENDIX A – Key Terms

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**Please note that the following definitions are meant to serve as a reference for readers and are not necessarily endorsed by the conference participants.**

**Agency** – The ability or capacity to act or exert power.<sup>2</sup>

**Best interests** – Interpreted broadly, the well-being of a child, as determined by a variety of individual circumstances, such as the age, maturity and life experience of the child; the presence or absence of family members or other social support networks; and the child's physical, cultural, political, and economic environment.<sup>3</sup>

**Child** – Defined in the CRC as any individual below the age of 18.<sup>4</sup> The terms 'child' and 'children' are used broadly in this report to refer to individuals falling anywhere on the developmental spectrum from infancy and early childhood to adolescence and early adulthood.

**Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)** – A United Nations human rights treaty establishing the civil, political, economic, social, health, and cultural rights of children.

**Evolving capacity** – The notion that “as children grow and develop, gain maturity and experience, become more autonomous and more responsible,” the kind of guidance and assistance they require from adults changes.<sup>5</sup> This transformative process within children influences how they participate and how adults support and respond to them.

**Participation** – The CRC calls on States to “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.”<sup>6</sup> Participation in this context is thus about self-expression on the one hand and acknowledgement, dialogue, and exchange on the other. Participation is not age-limited or context-specific. Participation also includes the choice *not* to participate and freedom from coercion and manipulation to participate one way or another.<sup>7</sup> Participation is one of the guiding principles of the CRC, underlying the realization of all other rights. Participation remains a difficult concept to pin down, hence the discussion devoted to this at the beginning of the conference. The definition put forward in this summary is by no means definitive.

**Protection** – For the purposes of the conference, child protection was broadly defined as any efforts aimed at protecting the rights of children, while improving their quality of life and

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<sup>2</sup> "agency, n." Oxford University Press. (2015). *OED Online*. Retrieved December 17, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations High Commission for Refugees. (2008). UNHCR Guidelines on Determining the Best Interests of the Child. Retrieved December 17, 2015 from <http://www.unhcr.org/4566b16b2.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> UN General Assembly. (1989). *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Retrieved December 17, 2015 from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>.

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF. *Fact Sheet: The right to participation*. Retrieved December 17, 2015 from <http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Right-to-Participation.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> UN General Assembly, *Convention*.

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF. *Fact Sheet*.

well-being. Like participation, protection is a term that can be understood in a variety of ways.

**Non-governmental organization (NGO)** – A non-profit entity independent of government influence. Also referred to as a civil society organization (CSO).

**Global North/global South** – Generally, definitions of the global north include North America, Western Europe, and developed parts of East Asia. The global south is made up of Africa, Latin America, and developing Asia, including the Middle East. The distinction between the global north and global south is broadly considered a socio-economic and political one.

**Sustainable development goals** – A set of 17 goals put forward by the UN General Assembly's Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals that target a broad range of social, economic, and environmental issues, including ending poverty and hunger, improving health and education, making cities more sustainable, combating climate change, and protecting oceans and forests.<sup>8</sup>

**Third Optional Protocol** – An optional protocol to the CRC that facilitates children's submission of complaints about violations of their rights to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

**Tokenism** – When children are unaware of or excluded from components of the participation process and when there is no genuine engagement with or meaningful follow-up to their participation.<sup>9</sup>

**United Nations (UN)** – An intergovernmental organization to promote international cooperation. Its objectives include maintaining international peace and security, promoting human rights, fostering social and economic development, protecting the environment, and providing humanitarian aid in cases of famine, natural disaster, and armed conflict.

**Voice** – The ability to engage in meaningful conversation, to make a difference through what one says, and to have a say in key decisions. When parties have a voice, their viewpoints, thoughts, and feelings receive a "fair hearing" and are readily recognized by others.<sup>10</sup>

**Youth** – According to some UN agencies, any individual between the ages of 15 and 24.<sup>11</sup> In this report, the term is used specifically to denote older children, in discussions of issues unique to them.

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<sup>8</sup> UN Department of Public Information. (2014). *UN General Assembly's Open Working Group proposes sustainable development goals*. Retrieved December 17, 2015 from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/4538pressowg13.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF. *Fact Sheet*.

<sup>10</sup> Maiese, M. (2005). *Voice. Beyond Intractability*. Retrieved December 17, 2015 from <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/voice>.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Definition of Youth*. Retrieved December 17, 2015 from <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>.

## APPENDIX B – Conference Program

MONDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2015 – Thomas Lounge at Oakham House (63 Gould Street)

7:30 – 8:15 BREAKFAST		
Registration Video presentations from National Association of Child Care Workers (South Africa) and The Concerned for Working Children (India)		
<b>8:15 – 8:30 Introduction</b>	Welcome, objectives, schedule and logistics: Tara Collins, Ryerson Uni.	Outcome: Shared understanding of event's core objectives.
<b>8:30 – 9:00 Definition of participation 1/3</b>	<p><u>Armchair discussion (20 min.)</u> Susan Bissell, UNICEF International &amp; Landon Pearson, Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights</p> <p><u>Audience commentary (10 min.)</u></p>	Outcome: Presentation of definition and scope of participation with historical context.
<b>9:00 – 9:40 Definition of participation 2/3</b>	<p><u>Short presentations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laura Wright, Right to Play (5 min.)</li> <li>• Ivette Fonseca, Plan Canada (5 min.)</li> <li>• Thaila Dixon-Eeet, Project C (5 min.)</li> <li>• Fred Hareau, Equitas (5 min.)</li> <li>• Linda Dale, Children/Youth as Peacebuilders (5 min.)</li> </ul>	Outcome: Overview of different definitions of and approaches to child participation and the significance of this definition in child participation work.
<b>9:40 – 10:00 Definition of participation 3/3</b>	<p><u>Brief plenary discussion (20 min.)</u> <i>What are core elements of our understanding of child participation in protection?</i></p>	Outcome: Core elements of a definition for this conference in relation to international child protection.
<b>10:00 – 10:15 BREAK</b>		
<b>10:15 – 11:15 Ethical tensions</b>	<p><u>Panel presentations</u> Olivia Lecoufle, Save the Children Canada (10 min.)</p> <p>Gillian Mann, Child Frontiers (10 min.)</p> <p>William Myers, University of California at Davis (10 min.)</p> <p>Kavita Ratna, Concerned for Working</p>	Outcome: Identification of key issues related to ethical tensions.

	Children, India ( <b>10 min.</b> )  <u>Q&amp;A (15 min.)</u>	
<b>11:15 – 12:00</b> <b>Ethical tensions</b>	<u>Group work (45 min.)</u> Delineating tensions based on different case studies (6-7 groups of 8-10 participants): 1. Commercial sexual exploitation (led by Ghizlaine Ben Zerrouk, IBCR) 2. Children in gangs (led by Nicole D'souza, McGill University) 3. Children affected by corporate/NGO interests (led by Philip Cook, IICRD) 4. Children in care (led by Judy Finlay, Ryerson University) 5. Children in the environmental movement (led by William Myers, University of California at Davis) 6. Children in virtual spaces (led by Dena Aufseeser, University of Maryland) 7. Children in conflict with law enforcement (led by Jo Boyden, Oxford University) <u>Gallery walk (15 min.)</u> Opportunity to view points raised by different groups.	Outcome: Map of areas of ethical tension and arguments that outline this tension.
<b>12:00 – 12:15</b>		
<b>12:15 – 1:00 LUNCH</b> Poster and video presentations		
<b>1:00 – 1:35</b> <b>Legal tensions</b> What is the legal status of children and how does it impact child participation?	<u>Short presentation</u> Ben Elgaza, Youth  <u>Panel presentations</u> Kay Tisdall, University of Edinburgh ( <b>10 min.</b> )  Lucy Jamieson, Children's Institute, University of Cape Town ( <b>10 min.</b> )  <u>Q&amp;A (5 min.)</u> <u>Tension mapping (10 min.)</u>	Outcome: Identification of key legal tensions to prepare for group discussions.

<p><b>1:35 – 2:10</b>  <b>Political tensions</b>  How children and political structures can collaborate and collide</p>	<p>Irene Rizzini, Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (<b>10 min.</b>)</p> <p>Richard Carothers, Partners in Technology Exchange &amp; Dena Aufseeser, University of Maryland (<b>10 min.</b>)</p> <p><u>Q&amp;A (5 min.)</u></p> <p><u>Tension mapping (10 min.)</u></p>	<p>Outcome: Identification of key political tensions to prepare for group discussions.</p>
<p><b>2:10 – 2:30 BREAK</b></p>		
<p><b>2:30 – 3:30</b>  <b>Priorities within the ethical, legal and political spheres</b></p>	<p><u>Group work (60 min.)</u>  Discussing priorities for action in the ethical, legal, and political domains (6 groups of 10 participants).</p> <p>1. Ethical groups (2)  2. Legal groups (2)  (e.g. Creation of independent legal mechanism to adjudicate complaints related to children's participation rights)</p> <p>3. Political groups (2)  (e.g. Utility of CRC 3<sup>rd</sup> optional protocol as outlined in Sonja Grover's fictional case)</p> <p><u>Group presentations (5 min./group)</u>  Report back to plenary for discussion.</p>	<p>Outcome: Identification of key priorities for action in areas of ethical, legal, and political tension.</p>
<p><b>3:30 – 4:00</b></p>		
<p><b>5:00 – 6:30</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>PUBLIC PANEL ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS</b></span>  <b>Room 250 in the Podium Building</b> (350 Victoria Street)</p> <p>Panelists: <i>Susan Bissell, Jo Boyden, Thaila Dixon-Eeet, Jason Hart, Lucy Jamieson, Gerison Lansdown, Bill Myers, Landon Pearson, Kavita Ratna, Irene Rizzini, Kay Tisdall</i></p>		

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2015 – International Room at the International Living/Learning Centre (entrances at 133 Mutual Street and 240 Jarvis Street)**

<p><b>7:45 – 8:15 BREAKFAST</b>  <b>Poster and video presentations</b></p>		
<p><b>8:15 – 8:30</b></p>	<p>Welcome back and summary of day one outcomes.</p>	<p>Outcome: Collective understanding of key learnings from day one.</p>

<b>8:30 – 9:00</b> <b>Practical tensions</b>	<u>Presentations</u> Jason Hart, University of Bath ( <b>10 min.</b> )  Gerison Lansdown, International children's rights advocate ( <b>10 min.</b> )  Anna Amy Ho, Former Crown Ward, Crisis Counsellor at Victim Services Toronto, Public Speaker, and Dancer/Aerialist ( <b>10 min.</b> )	Outcome: Bridging the ethical/political/legal discussion with the practice of institutions.
<b>9:00 – 10:30</b> <b>Practical tensions</b> Institutional barriers such as lack of resources, capacity, time, safeguarding, etc.	<u>Carousel (90 min.)</u> Identifying tensions in practice and key priorities for action.  (Participants rotate twice between three stations of their choice from a total of six stations; 40 mins. at first, 30 mins. at second, and 20 mins. at third.) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Social and attitudinal barriers (<i>e.g. adults who resist the idea that children have agency</i>)</li> <li>2. Resource limitations (<i>e.g. human, financial, temporal</i>)</li> <li>3. Institutional barriers (<i>e.g. alignment with donors, with policies</i>)</li> <li>4. Tokenism of child participation processes (<i>how to balance quantity and quality?</i>)</li> <li>5. Safeguarding and child participation (<i>are we putting children at risk?</i>)</li> <li>6. Monitoring and evaluating participation (<i>is this and how can this be effectively implemented?</i>)</li> </ol>	Outcome: Identification of practical tensions and key priorities for action.
<b>10:30 – 10:50</b> <b>Practical tensions</b>	<u>Group presentations</u> <b>(3 min./group = 18 min.)</b> Facilitators present back core concepts from each station.	
<b>10:50 – 11:05 BREAK</b>		
<b>11:05 – 12:00</b>	<u>Mind mapping (55 min.)</u>	Outcome: Map of broader

<b>Current trends in the field</b>	<p>Mapping trends that affect the field now and voting on trends that will have the most impact, positive or negative, on the field.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Areas of progress, stagnation, and regression</li> <li>• Conceptual/theoretical shifts</li> <li>• Degree of social, political, and institutional investment and support nationally/internationally</li> </ul>	trends affecting the field of child participation in international child protection and identification of the most impactful trends.
<b>12:00 – 12:45 LUNCH</b> <b>Poster and video presentations</b>		
<b>12:45 – 1:30</b> <b>Recommendations for future action</b>	<p><u>Group work (45 min.)</u> Given the current trends in the field, generating recommendations for collectively moving the field forward. (6 groups of 10 participants, 2-3 recommendations per group)</p>	Outcome: Recommendations for a future research and practice agenda.
<b>1:30 – 2:15</b>	<p><u>Group presentations</u> (7 min./group = 45 min.) Sharing recommendations with plenary.</p>	
<b>2:15 – 2:30</b>	<p><u>Plenary discussion (15 min.)</u> Identifying common themes from group presentations.</p>	
<b>2:30 – 2:45</b> <b>Summative remarks</b>	<p><u>Presentation</u> Jo Boyden, University of Oxford (15 min.) <i>Crucial tensions and future directions: Reviewing the conference themes and outcomes</i></p>	Outcome: Overview of the range of challenges in promoting participation and ideas for potential next steps.
<b>2:45 – 3:00 BREAK</b>		
<b>3:00 – 5:00</b> <b>Monitoring participation</b>	<p><u>Training session (2 hrs.)</u> Gerison Lansdown, International children's rights advocate <i>Training in Monitoring &amp; Evaluation Toolkit</i></p>	Outcome: Skill development in M&E toolkit.
<b>5:00 – 5:30</b> <b>Evaluations and conclusion</b>	<p><u>Survey (30 min.)</u> Evaluate the conference and conclude collectively.</p>	Outcome: Assessment of the conference and appreciation of all participants.

## APPENDIX C – Participant List

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Name	Affiliation/Organization
Dena Aufseeser	University of Maryland
Ghislaine Ben Zerrouk	International Bureau for Children's Rights
Sue Bennett	University of Ottawa
Susan Bissell	Director a.i., the new Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, UNICEF
Anik Blais	Ministry of Employment and Social Development Canada
Jo Boyden	University of Oxford
Christina Brinco	Ryerson University
Tamara Britton	Ryerson University
Virginia Caputo	Carleton University
Richard Carothers	Partners in Technology Exchange
Caroline Chikoore	World Vision Canada
Tara Collins	Ryerson University
Philip Cook	International Institute for Child Rights and Development
Linda Dale	Children/Youth as Peacebuilders
Snezhana Derzhanovskaya	Representative of the Ombudsman for Children, Ukraine
Aurelia di Santo	Ryerson University
Thaila-Paige Dixon-Eeet	Project C
Nicole D'souza	McGill University
Irwin Elman	Ontario Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth
Judy Finlay	Ryerson University
Kathleen Flynn-Dapaah	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada
Ivette Fonseca	Plan Canada
Sonja Grover	Lakehead University
Francis Hare	Ryerson University
Frédéric Hareau	Equitas: International Centre for Human Rights Education
Jason Hart	University of Bath
Emrul Hasan	Plan Canada
Eleanor Hevey	UNICEF Canada
Anna Amy Ho	Former Crown Ward, Crisis Counsellor at Victim Services Toronto, Public Speaker, and Aerialist
Vanessa Humphries	UNICEF Canada
Lucy Jamieson	Children's Institute, University of Cape Town
Kate Jansen	War Child
Alana Kapell	Children's rights consultant
Noah Kenneally	Ryerson University
Gerison Lansdown	International Children's Rights Advocate
Olivia Lecoufle	Save the Children Canada
Ilana Lockwood	University of Toronto

Michelle MacInnes-Rae	War Child
Gillian Mann	Child Frontiers
Kim Martens	Martens Consulting
Bill Myers	University of California, Davis
Henry Parada	Ryerson University
Hon. Landon Pearson	Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights, Carleton University
Nick Petten	Petten Consulting
Kavita Ratna	The Concerned for Working Children
Irene Rizzini	International Center for Research and Policy on Childhood (CIESPI). Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro
Mónica Ruiz-Casares	McGill University
Dahlia Sherif	Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth
Tanja Suvilaakso	Plan Canada
Kay Tisdall	University of Edinburgh
Jean Sébastien Vallée	Equitas: International Centre for Human Rights Education
Reena Vohra	World Vision Canada
Joanna Wedge	Consultant, Child Protection Working Group
Laura Wright	Right to Play
Maggie Zeng	Christian Children's Fund of Canada

## APPENDIX D – THANK YOU

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**This conference could not have happened without the invaluable support of numerous individuals and organizations.**

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the following individuals and organizations, whose generous financial support made this event possible:

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada  
 Office of the Dean, Faculty of Community Services, Ryerson University  
 Office of the Vice President, Research & Innovation, Ryerson University  
 School of Child and Youth Care, Ryerson University  
 Foundation for Canadian Studies (UK)  
 International Child Protection Network of Canada  
 School of Social Work, Dr. Henry Parada, Ryerson University  
 University of Bath  
 Save the Children Canada  
 Christian Children's Fund of Canada

We warmly acknowledge our project partners (alphabetical order):

Equitas: International Centre for Human Rights Education  
 Faculty of Community Services, Ryerson University  
 International Child Protection Network of Canada  
 Office of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation, Ryerson University  
 Plan Canada  
 Right to Play  
 Save the Children Canada

We recognize the tireless work and boundless enthusiasm of the conference organizing committee (in alphabetical order):

Richard Carothers  
 Tara Collins  
 Sonja Grover  
 Frédéric Hareau  
 Olivia Lecoufle  
 Mónica Ruiz-Casares  
 Kay Tisdall  
 Jean-Sébastien Vallée  
 Laura Wright  
 with the assistance of Noah Kenneally & Ilana Lockwood

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Lauren Akbar	Jahna George
Christine Baccus	Alana Kapell
Christina Brinco	Kim Martens
Nick Petten	