

Fostering global dialogue: Conceptualisations of children's rights to participation and protection

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Abstract

The children's rights and child protection sectors are at a critical juncture: will they evolve to reflect and respond to changing conceptualisations in the 21st century or will they continue to reproduce 19th- and 20th-century preoccupations with saving child victims? Informed by systematic reviews of the English- and Latin American academic literature in Spanish and Portuguese and key informant interviews with international stakeholders, this paper fosters global dialogue with some Global South and Global North perspectives about the interconnections of children's rights. It explores current conceptualisations of child participation and protection, and concludes that children's rights will only progress after recognition of limitations inherent to current conceptualisations.

KEYWORDS

child and youth participation, child protection, children's rights, Global North, Global South

INTRODUCTION

The mass coordinated movements of young people around the world to protest lack of government action on climate change have captured global attention. Not only do these social movements speak to the power of social media to mobilise large numbers, they also highlight the child's right to participate in matters of concern to them, including their right to protection. Children are no longer waiting for adults to make the change; they are leading the charge for it. From a decolonial perspective, we need to ask whose voices are being heard in such movements, especially in countries with a history of being colonised, where the oppressed often are silenced (Freire, 2000; Spivak, 1994). These protests involve

children from outside traditional Western powers (e.g. Bega, 2019) and reflect children's efforts to claim their rights to participation and protection, and their lack of satisfaction with the status quo or trust that authorities will take necessary actions. They challenge dominant discourses and expose the need for formal and informal child protection efforts to evolve. Thus, the child rights and child protection sectors are at a critical juncture: will they reflect and respond to the powerful demands of conceptualisations in the 21st century or will they continue to reproduce 19th- and 20th-century pre-occupations with saving child victims?

Children's rights have influenced the conceptualisations and practices of child protection and participation since the 1989 United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Scholars have increasingly focused on theory, practice and how they are interconnected (Evans, 2009; Inchaurredo et al., 2018; McCafferty, 2017; Radford et al., 2017; Sanders & Mace, 2006; Singh & Jha, 2017; Streuli et al., 2009; Tisdall, 2017). Many have demonstrated the gap between rhetoric and practice (e.g. Collins, 2017; Naker et al., 2007). Individual rights tend to be understood in isolation causing the interconnections of rights to be underappreciated and practiced. Yet, moving forward, it is important to redress this lacuna to better respect children's rights. Moreover, research that values the participation of children and youth reveals that they want to be heard (Cody, 2017; Holt, 2018; Vis et al., 2012), rather than receive traditional paternalistic protection (Bubadu e et al., 2016).

This paper presents some findings from a larger research project of the International and Canadian Child Rights Partnership (ICCRP; ICCRP, 2020).¹ Our international research partnership recognises global children's rights and the relevance of specific contexts. Our linkages across Global South and Global North are important to support global dialogue and understanding of children's rights. In phase 1 of a 3-year research project, the ICCRP explored current international conceptualisations of children's rights to participation and protection and the monitoring of this connection. This paper focuses on these conceptualisations and their interconnections. We conducted a review of academic literature published between 2005 and 2019 in English, Spanish and Portuguese, and interviews with key international stakeholders. Our data analysis was informed by a child rights-based approach (Collins & Par e, 2016; Lundy & McEvoy, 2012). Decolonial perspectives contributed to the analysis to discuss pertinent power dynamics (Ballestrin, 2017; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Dussel, 1993; Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 1997).

Our goal is to foster dialogue between the Global South and Global North as our findings identified this gap. As this paper explores, influential discourses and ideologies in the Global North hinder progress for children and youth because they are still based on traditional ideals rooted in colonialism. Systemic change is needed because the traditional understandings and institutions of child protection no longer reflect the evolution and requirements of child rights. Traditional ideologies are linked with institutions and actors with hegemonic power and resources, and continue to determine priorities and how rights are interpreted—while oppressing emerging discourses about rights. Resistance to these emerging contributions perpetuates tensions, disconnects and power imbalances between adults and children, Global North and Global South, and theory and practice. North–South dialogue can augment hidden and oppressed voices and connect knowledge produced in both hemispheres.

The terms 'North' and 'South' were first used by the Independent Commission on International Development Issues (commonly the Brandt report) in 1980 to distinguish between 'developed' regions (Europe and North America) and 'developing' regions. Since then, the terms have evolved to reflect geopolitical power relations that involve 'an entire history of colonialism, neo-imperialism, and differential economic and social change' (Dados & Connell, 2012, p. 13). This kind of dichotomy is generalised and not consistently appropriate, due to the particular political, cultural, economic and historical contexts of each country (Authors et al., 2020), but this terminology is a helpful framework. The authors of this article, who come from the Global North and the Global South (Canada and

Brazil) have taken into account tensions and common aspects that bridge research as reflected in the literature and interviews. We based our analysis on the following questions. How can we advance dialogue within and across jurisdictions, geographic and social locations to learn from each other? How can we better collaborate to inform our understandings about conceptualisations and interconnections of children's rights?

The subsequent section presents the research methodologies for data collection and theoretical frameworks. We examine conceptualisations of child participation and child protection. The next section focuses on the interconnections and disconnect between protection and participation rights. The conclusion offers some directions for future research and dialogue.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Data sources and search criteria: Systematic review methodology

We explored current conceptualisations by reviewing academic literature in English, Spanish and Portuguese and conducting key informant interviews (KIIs) with stakeholders in five continents. The literature review included English-language articles from all over the world and Spanish- and Portuguese-language articles from Latin America. This systematic literature review began in February 2017 and included the terms of 'child participation', 'protection', 'monitoring' and 'evaluation'. Our primary purpose was to explore what these different literatures yielded when using the same set of key terms.

Inclusion criteria consisted of peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles that explicitly included both concepts of the child's rights to participation and protection in the title, abstract and/or keywords. We initially applied UNICEF's definition of child protection encompassing efforts 'preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse against children—including commercial sexual exploitation, trafficking, child labour and harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation/cutting and child marriage' (2006, p. 1). However, we became concerned about the narrow focus on institutional priorities rather than on rights violations, children and how ideologies and practices from the Global North reinforce traditional understandings of protection. Therefore, we developed our own working definition and included articles related to child protection efforts in terms of formal and informal prevention, promotion and intervention activities and measures to keep children safe from violations of their rights. Thus, examples of child protection include efforts by child welfare/protection systems including those for children living 'in care' of the state and by other institutions and organisations across such sectors as health, education, justice and development, and for particular populations. Nonetheless, this limited definition reflects the literature's Global North and adultcentric understandings of protection that have been challenged by both adults and children, that is, child labour (Collins, 2017; Peleg, 2018). The difficulty in establishing a definition that accurately reflects children's perspectives, other rights and contexts reveals the need for a paradigm shift in how protection is conceptualised.

Exclusion criteria were non-scholarly non-peer-reviewed articles, academic articles published outside the specified time period, and those that identified participation or protection but not in conjunction with the other. Articles about participatory research were excluded due to their main focus on methodology. Books, theses and dissertations were excluded due to limited resources and time.

English language literature databases

A search of multiple databases including Social Services Abstracts, PsycInfo, ProQuest Sociology Collection, PAISIndex, Scopus and Google scholar (limited to the first five pages of results) yielded 96 articles published from January 2005 to March 2017. This search was updated in December 2018 to identify articles published from January 2016 to December 2018; it yielded 49 articles (without duplication from the first search). Some articles may have been excluded due to Scopus processing and indexing delays (Elsevier, 2020).

Spanish and Portuguese literature databases: Focus on Latin America

The Latin American systematic literature review included 156 articles: 96 published in Spanish and 60 in Portuguese using the aforementioned parameters and keyword combinations. Searches were performed using several tools, for example, Capes Journal Portal, Scielo, WorldCat and especially Google Scholar, which yielded access to content from various databases and different countries. Additionally, we consulted specialists from the Latin American Childwatch Network who identified new titles. This process initially yielded 72 articles on child participation (46 Spanish, 26 Portuguese) published from January 2005 to June 2015 including theses and dissertations, which were excluded from the analysis to ensure consistency with the English-language review. A second round of research focused on articles published from July 2015 to December 2019, yielding another 84 articles (50 Spanish, 34 Portuguese).

Key informant interviews

To complement the literature review, we conducted KIIs exploring emerging themes and gaps in current conceptual understandings and practices, and incorporating international perspectives beyond the academic literature. After obtaining research ethics approvals, we conducted interviews with 18 KIIs either online, by phone or in-person from May to October 2017. Key informants included adult professionals working in the fields of child rights, child protection, children's participation and monitoring, with expertise across professional sectors (non-governmental, international organisations (IO) and/or academic) and geographies. Some participants supported snowball sampling to recruit others from diverse sectors and geographies, including from North and South America, Africa, Europe, the Middle East and the UN. Each identified their own professional category. These interviews provided practical and relevant perspectives and knowledge not yet captured in the academic literature. Data collection from the KIIs was of particular importance considering the barriers for Global South representation in English-language publications, for example, language and access to publication.

Limitations

Data collection involved the following limitations. Our paper does not comprehensively scan the world's academic literature on this topic, rather relies upon a review of the English-, Spanish- and Portuguese literature. The English-language literature review was affected by the lack of resources and access for communities around the world to publish in English (Theis, 2007). The 96 English-language articles included 19 articles situated in the Global South, 53 articles in the Global North

and 24 articles with global perspectives. Global North discourses are also strongly present in the Latin American academic literature. This suggests an overemphasis on Western knowledge; furthermore, researchers from the Global North may study the Global South with limited grounding or time there, which can result in them speaking for those in the Global South without awareness of the realities, complicated by deeply rooted colonial beliefs about the superiority of Northern knowledge (Grosfoguel, 2012; Mbembe, 2016). In the following discussion, we provide a sample of pertinent references as examples, as additional articles could be included. Different conceptualisations of participation may have been unearthed by using a different set of keywords. We did not include grey literature due to limited resources and time. Finally, we did not directly include children in data collection, although they helped to inform the overall research process including the KII interview questions (Authors et al. 2020), and they were included in a subsequent research stage.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

The following analysis is informed by a child rights-based approach, guided by children's rights as outlined in the CRC and other global, regional and national child rights resources. The Vienna Declaration of Human Rights states that all rights are 'universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated' and must be considered equally (UN, 1993, para. 5). From this perspective, respect of children is paramount and power imbalances including those between young people and adults need to be challenged. This kind of approach recognises that children are subjects of their rights, and duty-bearers are responsible to ensure the realisation of rights (Collins & Paré, 2016). Lundy and McEvoy (2012) noted that research objectives, processes and outcomes should reflect children's rights and their implementation. This can be complicated by the varying interpretations of rights. For example, some argue that the right to protection includes prohibition of child labour, while others disagree, stressing consideration of the rights to participation and identity (e.g. Peleg, 2018). Consequently, scholars need to focus on the 'tensions between children's protection and their developing autonomy, which need not be regarded as conflicting approaches, but rather as complementary notions' (Collins & Paré, 2016, p. 775).

Recognising the emphasis of Global North discourses in the English-language and Latin American literature and the barriers for Global South representation, we aimed to employ a critical review of the findings from a decolonial framework and begin a dialogue to spark further analysis and research. Decolonial perspectives are well established in Latin American and English-language literature (Ballestrin, 2017; Dei, 2012; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Dussel, 1993; Mignolo, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013; Quijano, 2007). However, there has been little exploration of the influence of colonisation on children's rights. Only recently has a critical approach to children's rights from a decolonial perspective emerged (e.g. Faulkner & Nyamutata, 2020; Grahn-Farley, 2008; Liebel, 2020). Decoloniality can interrogate the power configurations embedded within ideas, cultures and histories of knowledge production, validation and use in societal and institutional structures in creating and sustaining inequalities (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001). With regard to overcoming the oppression of oppressed peoples, most scholars agree that the goal is to question and challenge the foundations of institutionalised power and privilege, and the accompanying rationale for dominance in social relations (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Freire, 2000; Spivak, 1994). Our main focus is not whether and how decoloniality is included or not in the child rights discourse. Rather, it is to recognise that attention to power and colonialism can help clarify the conceptual dimensions of child and youth participation and reveal power relations, both in terms of intergenerational aspects (adult-child relations) and dominant academic production by the Global North over the South.

CONCEPTUALISATIONS

Influential conceptualisations of children inform the following exploration of the understandings of child participation and child protection. Many articles framed children as vulnerable and needing protection (van Bijleveld et al., 2015) although some authors challenge children's positioning as victims (Cody, 2017; Pavez-Soto, 2012; Radford et al., 2017), and describe children as active agents of change (Acero & Ayala, 2011; Balsells et al., 2017; Cody, 2017; Cussiánovich & Figueroa, 2009; Goh & Baruch, 2018; Graham, 2007; Holt, 2018; Mc Veigh, 2017; Nour, 2013; Pavelic & Salinas, 2014; Seim & Slettebø, 2017; van Bijleveld et al., 2015), and rights bearers (Caputo, 2017; Heimer et al., 2018). Yet hesitation and resistance continue in practice. For example, one academic KII (May) described how an international NGO planned an event with Bangladeshi children to visit Sweden but then cancelled it due to concerns that Swedish children would appear immature and inferior in comparison to the visiting children. Consequently, a valuable opportunity to highlight a rights-based, strengths-based approach was lost—whereby so-called ‘vulnerable’ children (e.g. on the streets) could be framed as being forced to mature fast to survive, rather than framing children simply inferior or superior. This example reveals how specific views about children's rights and childhood predominate in the Global North.

In this section, we first identify and discuss the concepts of child participation and child protection individually to support the subsequent discussion about their interconnections.

Child participation

The literature review and KIIs yielded rich conceptualisations of children's participation, reflecting tensions and commonalities across jurisdictions and contexts. Overall, participation is widely viewed as a right (e.g. Acero, 2011; Ajodhia-Andrews, 2016; Collins, 2017; Cussiánovich, 2013; Gallego-Henao, 2015; Graham, 2007; KII, academic, May; KII, academic, June; KII, consultant, June; Nour, 2013; Pavez-Soto, 2012; Ruiz-Casares et al., 2017; Streuli et al., 2009; Theis, 2007). According to the UN, child participation involves ‘...ongoing processes, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes’ (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009, p. 5). It is understood as a process in which children have influence on decision-making (Ballesté & Moudelle, 2016; Cahill & Dadvand, 2018; Collins, 2017; Damiani-Taraba et al., 2018; Gallego-Henao, 2015; Roesch-Marsh et al., 2017; Sæbjørnsen & Willumsen, 2017). Fundamentally, participation should be taken seriously, and empower children in decisions about their own lives, their family and their communities (KII academic, May; KII academic, June; KII consultant, June; KII NGO Advocate, July; KII researcher advocate, June).

However, discrepancies emerged with regard to how the right to participation is interpreted (van Bijleveld et al., 2015; Sandland, 2017) and interconnected to other rights (Murray, 2010). The following conceptualisations appreciate the multifariousness of participation and contribute to the advancement of meaningful participation. The literature recognises participation as complex (e.g. Caputo, 2017; Seim & Slettebø, 2017) and must account for socio-cultural (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018; Fylkesnes et al., 2018; Theis, 2007), political (Barilá & Amoroso, 2017) and economic contexts (Theis, 2007). The process generally involves preparation, review and action (Roesch-Marsh et al., 2017); reciprocal sharing of information, respect and dialogue, and feedback to children (van Bijleveld et al., 2015; Tisdall, 2017). Bordenave (1994), a Paraguayan academic, defined participation as a collective

experience learned through group praxis, whereby participation is learned while participating. Theis (2007) argued that 'children's participation has to be a transformative process that negotiates and changes the relationships between children and adults in their social, cultural, political and economic dimensions' (p. 9).

Latin American authors tend to emphasise children's competence and sense of autonomy through the concepts of *protagonismo infantil y juvenil* (child and youth protagonism) and *participación protagónica* (protagonic participation) (Rizzini, 2018, 2019). In Brazil, as in most Latin American countries, child and youth protagonism emphasises their proactive place and role in society, their autonomy, and sense of agency (Rizzini, 2018). Several Latin American authors referred to protagonic participation to highlight the proactive roles of children in different spaces and contexts, such as schools, community and family, as well as in state and municipal councils in the region that do not necessarily exist in other contexts (Cussiánovich, 2013; Cussiánovich & Figueroa, 2009; Pavelic & Salinas, 2014; Peña-Ochoa et al., 2014). This protagonism conceptualises participation as a collective understanding form of action, valuing young people's autonomy and their capacity to assume leadership roles (Albornoz et al., 2015; Corona & Morfín, 2001). In contrast, ideologies in the Global North tend to focus on individualism, which hinders children's participation and agency (Duncan, 2019). For example, Graham (2007) argues that British ideologies of individualism and childhood as universal produce a paradox for Black children in which their personhood is both targeted and made invisible. This perpetuates the silencing of Black children in care and requires new participatory approaches that recognise and focus on the resources and positive aspects in Black children's lives (Graham, 2007).

While there is substantial literature in the English language on political participation, citizenship and activism (e.g. McMellon & Tisdall, 2020; Smith, 2010), it is frequently disconnected from children's right to protection. In our findings, there were only a few English-language authors who emphasised the importance of children's participation in child protection to cultivate social change (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018; Chukwudozie et al., 2015; Green & Kloos, 2009; Theis, 2007). Cahill and Dadvand (2018) suggested that in the Global South, youth participation is seen as part of the solution to social, economic and health challenges.

Overall, participation should involve both children and adults in processes and benefits from collectivity, rather than isolation of age groups and individuals. Latin American authors tend to frame participation as both relational and intergenerational collective forms of action (Albornoz et al., 2015; Voltarelli, 2018). Numerous studies published in Spanish, Portuguese and English framed children's relationships with adults as crucial (Damiani-Taraba et al., 2018; Fylkesnes et al., 2018; Goh & Baruch, 2018; Husby et al., 2018; Inchaurren et al., 2018; Sanders & Mace, 2006; Seim & Slettebø, 2017; Toros et al., 2018; Voltarelli, 2018). However, these relationships are hindered by children's lack of power in relation to adults (Bennouna et al., 2017; Husby et al., 2018; Lay-Lisboa & Montañés, 2018; Sancho & Cáceres, 2017) and positioning as outsiders (Alfandari, 2017; Pert et al., 2017). The intergenerational dynamic of the power of adults over young people in spaces of participation (adultcentrism) is often identified as a barrier to children's participation (e.g. Bennouna et al., 2017; Caputo, 2017; Contreras & Pérez, 2011; Cussianovich, 2013; Husby et al., 2018; Pavez-Soto, 2012; Tisdall, 2017; KII, academic, June). This power imbalance is compounded for marginalised children (e.g. Cahill & Dadvand, 2018). Uniformly, the literature reviews and KIIs argued that children's participation is constrained by power imbalances and adults' beliefs about children (e.g. Acero & Ayala, 2010; Husby et al., 2018; KII academic, May). A common concern in relation to children's participation is that it may provide more opportunity for children who are privileged and exclude those on the margins, highlighting the importance of decolonial frameworks to redress this issue.

Child protection

Conceptualisations of child protection are underdeveloped when focusing on the interconnections (rights to participation and protection): they are limited in English-language articles and barely existent in Latin American articles. This may be an outcome of our focus on the interconnections of children's rights to participation and protection whereas research on protection independently would be very fruitful. In Latin America, this may also be the case because research in the region tends to prioritise young people's protagonism and autonomy, contrasting with traditional conceptions of protection associated with paternalism and protectionism.

Child protection lacks a clear definition (Tisdall, 2017). English-language articles discussed protection in the context of populations, policies, formal protection systems (e.g. Inchaurredo et al., 2018; Križ & Skivenes, 2017; Zhang, 2018) and/or broad rights-based perspectives (e.g. Cody, 2017; Collins, 2017; Tisdall, 2017). In the Latin American literature, the concept of child protection usually appeared in articles about vulnerability, where young people advocated on behalf of other children and their communities in favour of justice, equity and a better life (Roldan Vargas et al., 2017; Rizzini, 2018). Moreover, the Latin American literature tends to emphasise rights violations, highlighting an alternative understanding of the activity and field of child protection. Concerns about children's protection were consistently included, notably in research related to establishing mechanisms for preventing and responding to various children's rights violations, particularly in Brazil since the 1990 Statute on the Child and the Adolescent (Rizzini, 2011). Key informants referred to child protection in relation to: the lack of protective relationships (consultant, June); policy decisions made by people who are not well informed (academic, May); and young people not having rights or access to participation (IO official, June).

Tisdall (2017) noted that whether narrowly or broadly defined, protection understandings are conceptualised by adults and consistently fail to address the harms caused by structural contexts. The exclusion of children is significant because children's views can challenge prevalent protection perceptions, as evidenced by young children's views about risk and protection in Liberia (Ruiz-Casares et al., 2013) and children's depictions of their strengths and assets in Uganda (Green & Kloos, 2009). From a child rights-based approach, traditional child welfare narrowly frames protection, which should apply a broader concept of the right to protection encompassing all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation (Caputo, 2017).

Despite increasing research from around the world, including young people themselves and especially the Global South, conceptualisations of protection continue to reflect traditional 19th- and 20th-century approaches reflecting paternalism and framing children as victims (Collins, 2017). 'Child saving' was a priority in the late 19th and 20th centuries in various countries including Brazil, where rather than providing equitable services for all children, laws and charitable services were created for 'potentially troublesome' children (Rizzini, 2006). Thus, protection involves an urgent response to a vulnerable child in a specific situation, for example, after a tsunami or facing abuse at home, and adults who want or are obligated to respond, choose how to do so (Tisdall, 2017). Current understanding of the right to protection inadequately reflects the influence of other rights including the right to participation.

INTERCONNECTIONS OF RIGHTS ARE UNDERAPPRECIATED

In this section, we argue that children's rights are interdependent and one right cannot outweigh another. Indeed, the UN's (1993) Vienna Programme of Action outlines that human rights are characterised by their indivisibility or interconnections that cannot be undermined by prioritising one right over another. The CRC itself is not only concerned with protection but also participation and provision (e.g. Heimer & Palme, 2016; Murray, 2010; Zhang, 2018). Yet our data confirm not only a disconnect but also a corresponding lack of appreciation of the interconnections between conceptualisations of children's rights to protection and participation. The ongoing traditional and hegemonic prioritisation of protection over participation emasculates these rights and their understandings, which remain siloed from each other. As such, understandings and necessary contextualisations of these rights are adversely affected, inevitably leading to implications for practice, and questions about power dynamics and the relevance of children's rights (e.g. Faulkner & Nyamutata, 2020). The following discussion explores how the interconnections between these rights tend to be underappreciated due to the traditional prioritisation of protection over participation rights and the influence of Global North ideologies.

The literature revealed that the formal child protection sector is paralysed by outdated understandings of protection. Several studies reported that child protection specialists prioritise protection rights over participation (Bennouna et al., 2017; Inchaurredo et al., 2018; Križ & Skivenes, 2017). The interconnections of children's rights are hindered by normative attitudes such as 'adultocentrismo' (Lay-Lisboa & Montañés, 2018) and views of children as 'becoming' rather than 'being' (Heimer & Palme, 2016). This prevalence of paternalism (Alfandari, 2017; Evans, 2009) and protectionism (McCafferty, 2017; Skyrme & Woods, 2018) sustain the prioritisation of child protection above participation (Vis et al., 2012). For example, paternalistic ideologies reflect the view that adults know what is in the child's best interest (Vis et al., 2012). Numerous articles referred to tensions between child participation and other rights (Bennouna et al., 2017), especially with regard to the best interests principle (Bennouna et al., 2017; Damiani-Taraba et al., 2018; Holt, 2018; Streuli et al., 2009; van Bijleveld et al., 2015). However, it is argued that determining the best interest for children requires hearing them and taking their views into consideration (Coynne et al., 2011; Streuli et al., 2009; Vis et al., 2012). Consequently, we can see how the conceptualisations of protection and participation are interwoven and influence the equal implementation of rights. We need to be asking: what is the relationship between normative beliefs about children's rights and what children themselves are saying?

English-language and Latin American articles revealed unique challenges in the implementation of children's rights to participation in child protection (McCafferty, 2017; Ruiz-Casares et al., 2017; Seim & Slettebø, 2017; Tisdall, 2017). Many referred to barriers and limitations related to children's participation (Evans, 2009; Fylkesnes et al., 2018; Sancho & Cáceres, 2017; Cussiánovich, 2013; Pavez-Soto, 2012; Toros et al., 2018; van Bijleveld et al., 2015) and the tensions between participation and protection (Bennouna et al., 2017; Cody, 2017; Collins, 2017; Holt, 2018; Sanders & Mace, 2006). These challenges impede on the implementation of children's rights as universal and indivisible. Latin American authors used the term 'adultocentrismo' to describe how decision-making processes about children's rights and protection are adult-centred (Contreras & Pérez, 2011; Cussiánovich, 2013; Gallego-Henao and Gutiérrez-Suárez, 2015; Pavez-Soto, 2012). Acero and Ayala (2010) noted that children are seen as adult property, as potentials rather than current human beings, as individuals who are deprived of their rights as citizens. Similarly, the English-language literature recognised the predominance of adult-centred spaces and processes that are not inclusive for children's participation (Claasen & Spies, 2017; Pert et al., 2017). Sanders and Mace (2006) propose engaging

children in transforming these spaces. Children's meaningful participation requires that they have some power and influence in decision-making processes (Sæbjørnsen & Willumsen, 2017; Tisdall, 2017). Relational power dynamics between adults and children must be considered (Cahill & Dadvand, 2018; Caputo, 2017; Husby et al., 2018); adults and professionals must actively mitigate power imbalances to position children as partners (Husby et al., 2018) and power holders (Caputo, 2017).

Despite the barriers and tensions, support for the equal implementation and interconnection of these rights is increasing (Balsells et al., 2017; Caputo, 2017; Heimer & Palme, 2016; Holt, 2018; Husby et al., 2018). The KIIs agreed that these rights are interconnected (Consultant, June; Advocate, July) and that children must have their voices recognised in society to have a meaningful voice in protection contexts (KII, Academic, May). Zhang (2018) argues that a child right framework, with particular attention to the interconnectedness of rights, should be applied to redress the deficiencies with the current protection policy for left-behind children in China. Lack of connection between children's rights to participation and protection can place children at risk, for example, increase traumatic experiences, cause emotional distress and confusion, or hinder development (Balsells et al., 2017; Husby et al., 2018; Zhang, 2018). Acknowledgement of the interconnections between children's rights to participation and protection is a starting point, but much more work is needed. The work of understanding and appreciating interconnections needs to happen outside of crisis: in education, training and ongoing professional development. Adults, including professionals, need to resist traditional protectionist ideology, have greater respect for all children's rights, become more empowering, and have faith in children's evolving capacities (McCafferty, 2017).

Another issue is that spaces for children's participation in child protection efforts have largely focused on children's individual lives rather than their collective participation in public spheres or in design and delivery of protection services (Ruiz-Casares et al., 2013; Sanders & Mace, 2006). Have we adequately considered the influences of individualism and adult-centrism on the interconnection of child rights to participation and protection? Furthermore, how can we respond to the challenges posed by these outdated ideologies and practices to children's rights?

More conceptual development should begin with dialogue linking the Global South and Global North to reflect the ideas, discourses, concerns and practices embedded in diverse cultures and contexts. For example, the Children's Rights European Academic Network (CREAN, 2020) planned a conference to foster intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and clarify how social locations and power relations affect young people. A rights-based approach recognises the diversity of experiences, necessary responses and supports to advance interconnections. The voices of children themselves also need to be heard: Hanson and Nieuwenhuys (2013) proposed a 'living rights' approach wherein children inform understandings of their rights based on their own contexts and priorities. Further study to advance dialogue about children's rights between the Global South with Global North is encouraged in the future.

CONCLUSION: QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This paper aimed to raise critical questions, inquiry and spark an international dialogue about the inter-relationship between children's rights to protection and participation, highlighting a colonial influence that often prioritises Global North ideals. While human rights are intended to be understood as 'universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated' (UN, 1993, para. 5), this study reveals that current conceptualisations of children's rights to protection and participation continue to be isolated from each other. Moreover, hegemonic discourses and ideologies hold sway in how children are victims needing

protection without considering the rights to participation (and likely other rights). Consequently, children's participation in child protection is either weak or non-existent, and protection is still prioritised over participation. The views of children tend to be overlooked, and the interconnections between rights continue to be underappreciated. Our study stakeholders agreed that children must participate in protection rights in accordance with international and national rights-based instruments and policies. This will require more awareness of the interconnections among rights and integrating these into ideologies and practices involving children and youth.

The vast majority of the articles in our literature review referred to adult researchers and the settings or methodologies they used for data collection. Although more research is highlighting the need for more participation of young people as researchers (e.g. Ajodhia-Andrews, 2016; Chukwudozie et al., 2015; Green & Kloos, 2009), the voices of children and youth barely appear, except as quotes to complement adult research.² More research is needed to explore what conceptualisations and interconnections might emerge if young people provided their own interpretations. How do children and youth understand their rights to participation and to protection? How do they feel about adult views of their best interests, protection and the rhetoric about being heard?

Scholars working in the fields of children's rights and child protection are incredibly diverse at local, national, regional and international levels and generally operate in isolation. This diversity should be leveraged to advance conceptualisations of children's rights, by using a decolonial lens to explore commonalities and differences in the Global South and North. For example, Latin American scholars tend not to use the term 'child protection' and instead tend to emphasise collective participation, in contrast to the focus on the individual in the Global North. It is important to be aware that colonialism has and continues to influence children's rights, hindering progress for children and youth and those who work with them. Further exploration and research are needed that apply a decolonial framework to understanding and realising children's rights globally. More voices from the Global South must be heard—including scholars and practitioners, as well as children and youth themselves.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared due to ethical restrictions.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The ICCRP (2020) has focused on children's rights to participation and protection and monitoring this connection. After obtaining all institutional research ethic approvals, an international Child and Youth Advisory Committee (CYAC) was formed as part of the research team, supporting study design and implementation (Collins et al., 2020).
- ² Exceptions include Damiani-Taraba et al. (2018) where two youth leads were co-authors and Mc Veigh (2017) where children and youth rewrote a paper for a magazine.

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