

Judging children's participatory parity from social justice and the political ethics of care perspectives

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This article proposes a model for judging children's participatory parity in different social spaces. The notion of participatory parity originates in Nancy Fraser's normative theory for social justice, where it concerns the participatory status of adults. What, then, constitutes participatory parity for children? How should we judge the extent to which they are able to participate as equals in their different social environments? And how should we evaluate the adequacy of different social arrangements for children's participation, across the 'private/public' divide? The article examines the usefulness of three normative frameworks for judging the conditions for children to participate on an equal footing with others, in ways that support their well-being. Two frameworks are from the field of social justice theory; the third is from the political ethics of care. Selected concepts from all three frameworks are used to propose a normative model for children's participatory parity. Examples from a study on children's participatory practices in South African families illustrate the application of the model, which holds some promise for theorising children's participation in other participatory spaces.

Keywords: children's participation, participatory parity, social justice, capabilities and children, ethics of care

Introduction

Participatory parity, Nancy Fraser (1997; 2000; 2008) claims, is a normative ideal for social justice. Fraser is explicitly concerned with the participatory status of adults. This article begins with an assumption that children's participatory parity – namely, their ability to participate in an equitable way as full partners in their interactions with others – is an important condition for their well-being and that, while this is the case for all children, it is of particular concern for those who are marginalised or socially excluded. International and South African law categorises children as people younger than eighteen years. The assumption that participatory parity is a critical condition for children's well-being could thus, controversially, be taken as applying as much to infants and toddlers as it does to older children and adolescents.

What constitutes participatory parity for children? Are the evolving capacities of children at different ages pertinent to the criteria for participatory parity and, if so, how? How should we judge the extent to which they are able to participate as equals in their different social environments? How should we evaluate the adequacy of different social arrangements for children's participation?

From a theoretical point of view, answers to these questions presuppose a normative framework. In this article I propose a model for making judgements about the extent and nature of children's participatory parity and the social arrangements that enable or constrain it. The model is intended both as an analytical framework and as a set of normative principles for children's participation in different social spaces, including the political. It is thus a contribution towards a growing literature on the meaning of, and conditions of possibility for, children's rights to be heard in matters that concern them (see, for example, in this Special Issue, Bray & Moses 2011; Bentley 2011).

As a first move, I examine the usefulness of three normative frameworks for the conditions for children's ability to participate on an equal footing with others – two frameworks from the field of social justice theory; the third from political work on the ethics of care.

Within the field of social justice, it is not approaches to the distribution of social goods, such as Rawls' (2001), that are of interest in this instance but two alternative approaches, both of which address shortcomings in distributive theories of justice, namely, first, the capabilities approach, pioneered by

Amartya Sen (1984; 1995; 2001) and developed by – among others – Martha Nussbaum (1995; 2000; 2006) and, secondly, Nancy Fraser's trivalent social justice perspective (Fraser, 2008), which builds upon her earlier bivalent account where the notion of participatory parity first comes into play (see, for example, Fraser, 1997). The third framework to be considered is from the political ethics of care and is drawn from several sources, notably Kittay (1997; 1999; 2002), Sevenhuijsen (1998), and Tronto (1993).

Selected concepts from all three frameworks are then used to propose a model for children's participatory parity and its relation to their well-being.¹ Finally, an application of the model is illustrated by focusing on examples of children's practices, and their status and positionality within a study on South African students' families (Bozalek, 2004). Beyond the family domain, the model may well contribute to a theorisation of the ways in which other different spaces of participation are constitutive of agency and relationships that promote or prohibit participatory parity for children.

Desiderata for a normative model for children's participatory parity

Traditional approaches to social justice focus on how social resources are distributed and on how to shift the distribution to achieve greater equity (for example, Rawls, 1999; 2001). On this view, primary goods are the metric of social justice. The work of Rawls and other primary goods theorists has been conducted with little explicit attention to how the 'perspective of children should be represented and interpreted' (MacLeod, 2010: 174). One criticism of the metric of primary goods is that it is insufficiently sensitive to human diversity. For instance, the view does not accommodate the category of children as a separate group, but rather as dependents who benefit from adults as the primary recipients of social goods. How children as a group and different groups of children are differentially placed in relation to resources means that they may require differential amounts of resources in order to achieve an equitable desired state of well-being or participation.

Alternative approaches address these concerns by attending to notions of difference in social categories and the different resources that these groups would need in order to achieve participatory parity and well-being. In addition, it is important to identify normative frameworks which allow us to examine how children and their attributes are valued or devalued, what sort of responsibilities they are given, whether they are able to both give and receive care, and the extent to which their voices are represented.

Capabilities, participation and social justice

The human capabilities approach goes a considerable way towards meeting these desiderata. It provides an analytical framework for examining how children are differentially placed and the resources they would need to participate fully in social life and flourish as human beings.

Sen (1980; 1984; 1995; 2001) first presented the capability metric as an alternative to the primary goods metric which, he argued, paid little heed to the diversity of human beings and their very different needs depending on their situation, circumstances and personal characteristics. Nussbaum (1995; 2000; 2006) has developed a version of the capabilities approach, by offering and defending a list of the central capabilities for human flourishing.

The capabilities approach focuses not on what resources a person has, but on what (given the person's resources, personal traits and circumstances) s/he has the real freedom to be and do. On this view, a person's well-being is identified with the quality of his/her beings and doings. Income and other resources are not in themselves a meaningful way of assessing human well-being or quality of life. Without considering the particularity of who needs the resources and in what context these resources are needed, it is difficult to assess how effective the resources will be in allowing people, in this case children, to flourish. In other words, the capabilities approach offers a way of taking into account where children are positioned and what they are able to do with personal, material and social resources, rather than merely examining what resources children have access to and assuming that they are equally placed in relation to these resources. It acknowledges how people, including children, are differently positioned in terms of social markers, including age and generation. Knowledge of differences such as dis/abilities, location (rural/urban) would make it easier to decide what resources would be needed to enable children to flourish as human beings.

In Nussbaum's version, the capabilities approach is also one that treats each and every person as a worthy human being, as an end rather than a means to an end, and as a source of agency (Nussbaum, 2000; 2006). It thus precludes a consideration of the well-being of family, household, or community as aggregations, offering instead a way of assessing the particularities of each and every child's circumstances in relation to resources available and the child's consequent abilities to choose to live a good life.

The good life, according to Sen (1984; 2001) and Nussbaum (1995; 2000; 2006), is the ability to do valuable things and achieve valuable states, as well as being able to choose from different livings and meaningful affiliations, and not to be constrained into a particular form of life. Participation – understood as being able to do things for oneself and for others – is considered to be an important aspect of quality of life in the capabilities approach (Dreze & Sen, 1989).

In summary then, the capabilities approach focuses attention on the particularities of individual needs, which would require varying resources in order for individuals to achieve a threshold for human flourishing. With respect to just social arrangements, the capabilities approach requires one to examine both children's vulnerabilities in their life circumstances and their capabilities in relation to what resources would be required to promote well-being. For instance, an impoverished rural child who is a first-generation literate family member among his/her kin would need more and different resources to be able to study at school and attain the same capability level as a middle-class urban child whose kin are all literate. A child with a physical disability might need more and different resources to study effectively than an able-bodied child. Similarly, a child who is responsible for other siblings would require more and different resources to participate in education than one who has no siblings to care for.

Individual preferences are not reliable indicators of human needs, as those who are advantaged or disadvantaged easily become accustomed to their situations and adjust their expectations and aspirations accordingly. Long-established privilege or deprivation can lead to high and low levels of desire, and to people viewing their situations as 'normal' or 'natural', respectively (Nussbaum, 2000).

Thus, from the capabilities perspective, one is not interested in finding out how satisfied people, in this case children, are with their circumstances or what resources they have, but rather what valuable things they can do or be in order to function in a fully human way. It is for this reason that Nussbaum (1995; 2000) has developed a list of ten capabilities which, she proposes, any decent society should make possible for people to achieve: life; health; bodily integrity; development of senses, imagination and thought; practical reason; affiliation; access to recreation and play; control over the material and social environment; access to a good relationship with nature and the environment, and emotional health. If people fall below the threshold of any of these core areas, a society would, in Nussbaum's (1995; 2000; 2006) view, be regarded as unjust, and people's lives as not being fully human.

One of the questions posed at the outset of this article asked how the adequacy of different social arrangements for children's participation should be evaluated. The capabilities approach suggests a crucial criterion: What are children able to do and be (i.e. what human capabilities can they exercise) within a particular social arrangement or participatory space, and are the appropriate resources available to meet the needs of different participants? It is beyond the scope of this article to consider specific capabilities from Nussbaum's list and how they pertain to the value of, and conditions for, children's participation in matters that concern them.

Resources, recognition and representation

Nancy Fraser's (1997; 2000; 2008; 2009) ideas on social justice can be regarded as complementing and intersecting with the human capabilities perspective. Fraser, in addition to recognising the importance of redistributing resources for people to attain participatory parity, brings in a second type of claim for social justice – that of the politics of recognition. She advocates a dual consideration of redistribution of resources and recognition of status, which she terms a bivalent or bifocal view of justice (Fraser, 1997; 2000). Recognition has to do with how people – children in this instance – are regarded in relation to the social markers or distinctive attributes that are ascribed to them. Recognition for children would impact on whether they are regarded as full members of society and on their ability to interact on an equal footing

with other members of society. Misrecognition in terms of a lack of respect for one on the basis of one's social markers (age or generation, in this instance) prevents people from being able to interact with others as full partners. Recognition is an important concept in considering how societal norms in relation to race, gender and particularly generation in the case of children either value or devalue practices and social statuses. Rather than assuming that one has to conform to dominant norms, a social justice perspective aims to redress misrecognition by replacing, in a range of ways, including institutional and policy changes, values that impede parity of participation with ones which foster or enable it (Fraser, 2000). In other words, if institutional practices have led to institutional harms, these need to be redressed.

In Fraser's (2008; 2009) later writings, she introduces a third dimension of social justice, representivity or voice. This political dimension incorporates social belonging and determines who counts as a social member. In the same way that distribution relates to who is entitled to resources and recognition relates to whose attributes are regarded as valuable, representivity relates to who is included or excluded and whose voice will be heard as legitimate. All of these factors will impact on whether and to what extent a child will be able to interact on an equal footing, or as a peer, in society and its various participatory spaces. Nazir Carrim's article in this issue, for example, shows how curtailed children's representivity is in the formal space of school governance (Carrim, 2011).

To sum up, Fraser's account of social justice draws attention to three conditions for children's participatory parity: the distribution and availability of resources, recognition (how people's attributes are differentially valued or devalued), and voice (in the sense of political representation). From this perspective, the crucial criterion for assessing participatory arrangements, or a participatory space, is whether it allows for and supports children to interact with one another and with other participants, and be heard on an equal basis.

Well-being, care and participation

An ethic of care takes seriously the fact that care is a central aspect of human life (Tronto, 1993; Sevenhuijsen *et al.*, 2003). The political ethics of care foregrounds the notion that dependency, and interdependency, are an inevitable condition of human life and well-being and that, therefore, care and dependency should be considered in the social sharing of burdens through appropriate social arrangements, just as education, health services and road maintenance are (Kittay, 2002). Appropriate arrangements of care are crucial for children's survival and for their evolving participatory capacities.

The ethics of care draws attention to the relational nature of participation: relationships of care are dependent on a caregiver and a care receiver. This connection-based perspective is useful in foregrounding people's responsibilities towards each other in ensuring that they can both care for others and be cared for by others (Held, 2006). Destabilising notions of what people's 'natural' responsibilities are in terms of gender and generation, the political ethics of care locates practices of care in both the public and private spheres, and makes a moral claim for societal responsibility to ensure that care can be both given and received with some degree of choice and without prejudicing those involved in the caring practices.

Joan Tronto's (1993) delineation of four phases of care, and the value associated with each phase, distinguishes the different processes in the practice of care: (i) caring about, which calls upon the moral quality of attentiveness in noticing people's needs; (ii) caring for, which calls upon responsibility to meet the need for care; (iii) caregiving or taking care of, which calls upon competence to respond effectively and ensure that the necessary resources are available to do so; (iv) care receiving, which calls upon responsiveness. A fifth dimension, the integrity of care, integrates the four phases. Because of the relationship between the cared for and the carer, the moral integrity of care means that participation in the practice of care should proceed as co-constructed meaning-making and dialogue. The viewpoint of the other is always important in the practice of care (Bozalek & Lambert, 2008).

The political ethics of care approach is useful as a framework in that it allows us to examine the extent to which children are able to give and receive care, the responsibilities they assume, and whether they are to interact as citizens participating through dialogue. The political ethics of care also foregrounds particularity and vulnerability which are important in assessing how the contextual situations differ in

terms of what children may need in order to achieve participatory parity and well-being. In addition, the qualities of attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness that are crucial to the daily practices of care are all pertinent to the scope and depth of children’s exercise of agency in different participatory spaces.

A model for assessing children’s participatory parity and well-being

In this section, I propose a way of viewing children’s participatory parity and well-being within a single, comprehensive framework that incorporates concepts from the capabilities approach, the political ethics of care and Fraser’s trivalent account of social justice. The proposed model (see Figure 1) is a matrix that categorises indicators of social justice and care, and focuses on how these interact with social markers such as gender, race, geographical location and generation or age. It assumes that the indicators of social justice and care are necessary conditions for participatory parity. Specifically, the model provides an analytical framework for judging the adequacy of social arrangements for children’s participatory parity and well-being.

Figure 1

Comprehensive Model for Framework to judge Children’s Participatory Parity and Well-being					
Indicators for social justice	Social marker				
	Race	Gender	Generation	Ability	Geographical location
Recognition					
Resources					
Responsibilities					
Representation					
Goals of social justice and political ethics of care	Human flourishing/well-being; participatory parity; ability to give and receive care in situations of choice				

The indicators of social justice and care which have been identified in this model are: recognition (adapted from Nancy Fraser’s view of social justice, where she uses ‘recognition’ primarily in a restricted sense to mean status equality); resources (a concept that appears, in slightly different guise, in all three of the frameworks outlined); responsibility (to which the political ethics of care refers as a moral concept emanating from caring for and caregiving), and representation (which is the most recent aspect of Nancy Fraser’s view of social justice involving voice and belonging).

These social indicators can be mapped against the relevant markers when assessing children’s status or the practices in which they are engaging. The model depicted in Figure 1 also makes explicit the goals of social justice and care for children. These are identified as participatory parity from Fraser’s idea of interacting on a par as equals with others in society, and well-being (or human flourishing) which is used in the human capabilities and political ethics of care approaches to indicate a desired state of being and doing.

The model can be used to alert us to some crucial questions in relation to children’s participation and the conditions for their well-being in particular situations and participatory spaces: What are children able to do and be (i.e. what human capabilities can they exercise)? How are children disadvantaged or

privileged? What implications does this have for them in their lives (vulnerability and otherness in relation to the political ethics of care)? Are they able to interact on a par or on an equal basis with others (Nancy Fraser's goal of social justice which incorporates distribution, recognition and representation)? How do they fare in terms of being able to both give and receive care in situations of their own choice (the political ethics of care)?

Consider, as an example, the application of the model to an interpretation of South African students' accounts of family practices.

Families as participatory spaces: A South African example

A study conducted at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) (Bozalek, 2004) used four major questions to interrogate students' accounts of children's status and practices in their own families:

- To what extent were children able to gain access to resources in households, according to these students' accounts?
- How were children recognised or misrecognised in the students' accounts?
- Which kinds of work were children responsible for in the students' accounts of family practices?
- What voice or representivity did children have in the students' accounts of their family households?

In order to show how these four questions can be used to judge whether children were able to participate in an equitable manner, I use examples of data from UWC students' perceptions and practices regarding children within their own families.

Students reported that it was to a large extent women and young girls who were involved in cooking and cleaning in the home. The following excerpt is typical of students' accounts of the distribution of household responsibilities in their families:

In African families children learned how to cook at an early stage. This does not mean that they were curious but they were forced by the circumstances, whereby their parents worked until late. So children have to do everything for themselves (Family Profile 57).

Students cited various reasons for expectations that as children they would engage in unpaid work within the household. The first of these reasons was cultural practices. For example, some African students reported that at a certain age girls and boys were expected to do certain gender-specific tasks:

When we reached the age of 10 we were taught how to do things on our own. Girls were taught on how to clean the house, cooking and looking after the family and boys were not taught anything because men cannot do household work according to our cultural belief. As from the age of 10 children are doing household work and it is not the parents task anymore (Family Profile 76).

The second reason cited for children engaging in cleaning and cooking was that adults, usually mothers, were not available in the household, as they were involved in paid labour, usually for long hours:

My mother was mainly involved in the preparation of food and cleaning of the home. But when we moved into Westgate, Mom was forced to get a job. So this meant that I had to take over chores at home. I had to do my chores immediately after school. At the age of thirteen I had a big responsibility (Family Profile 106).

A third reason reported for children being involved in caregiving tasks was a sense of gratitude to their parents' providing resources for them, for education for example. As children, the students expressed a need to reciprocate for benefits they received and said that they willingly did tasks in the household. This is evident in the following example:

Most of the domestic labour in the house is being performed by all the children in the household. My mother Masidisau is the only parent who is paying for education of every child within the household. In this case, we feel that we should also help her in the domestic labour in the house without being paid (Family Profile 115).

.In terms of caregiving, in some instances young girls missed days of school or gave up school or paid employment altogether in order to care on a full-time basis for chronically ill or dependent people. In other cases children took it in turns to be absent:

My mother then had two more strokes and after the third time, she did not recover the way we all had hoped she would. My sister Cathy had to quit school to take care of mother while she was still ill (Family Profile 107; life history of mother).

This excerpt illustrates widespread expectations that adolescent girls would abandon whatever they were engaged with in order to single-handedly care for all the needs of highly dependent kin for extended periods of time. This would have had many consequences for their ability to pursue education and would have affected their future employability, and therefore their ability to acquire resources in later life.

In the students' accounts of how children were viewed in their households, they were described as those carrying the least status, as those who were not accorded much respect by their elders, and as being in the position of supplicants in relation to their elders. In many of the families described, children are perceived as a group rather than as individuals and as having a lower status than adult members of the household:

Children have to work for their parents and if they marry they still have to look after them if necessary. If one child in the family did wrong all the children were punished. Older members of the family get their food first and then the kids. Children's duties ranged from fetching water at the river, chopping wood, baking bread and cooking food. Each child knew his/her duties and had to perform these duties everyday. If they failed to perform these duties they were either punished or denied food for the whole day, therefore they didn't focus much on schoolwork. Some of the children, especially the older ones, had to go and help on the farm after school (Family Profile 28).

Students often reported that in their families, children's expressions of their own needs were expressly discouraged by older family members. Moreover, children were not even encouraged to communicate their responses directly to older members:

When a child responds to the older person the child is regarded as showing disrespect. When the children need something they have to ask their mother to ask permission for them (Family Profile 72).

Hierarchically ordered practices of respect resulted in a lengthy and indirect method of requesting resources for children:

Children were expected to respect elderly people. If a child need[s] something like money to pay for a trip, she would start by asking her elder sister or brother to ask her mother for it. Her mother is the one to approach her father and it will depend on her father whether he gives her or he doesn't. If maybe the trip was important for her studies, and her father [was] refusing her [permission] to go, the mother would approach either the grandfather or grandmother and ask him/her to talk with the father. Women also had to ask for whatever they need from their husbands and they were not allowed to call their husbands or parents-in-law by name (Family Profile 1).

In African students' accounts, age affected where one sat, whether one was allowed in the same room as those of a different age and gender, what one was permitted to eat, and who got the most nutritious food. For example, students reported a patriarchal and gerontocratic situation where men were given the best and biggest portions, and women and children were given the least adequate portions in terms of nourishment and amount of food. In some African students' accounts certain parts of the meat were given differentially to men, women and children. The following excerpt illustrates these age-dependent patterns of distribution:

The older members of the family were given privileges above younger members. The adults got their food before the children. The adults sat on chairs or couches while the children and teenagers on the floor or something else (Family Profile 103).

Gender and age determined not only the amount of food to which one had access, the type of food and implements with which one could eat, the order in which people were given their food and where and when one sat to eat, but also the ability to comment upon the discrepancies in access to resources.

Applying the normative model for participatory parity and well-being

In considering how the social markers of generation have, according to students, impacted upon them and their family members, the goals of the normative model need to be considered: Were children able to participate as equals? Were they able to both give and receive care, and did they have the resources to do so? Were they able to flourish and/or were they prevented from doing so?

Students' accounts show that generation-constructed differences impact on how resources are distributed in the household, whether children are recognised or misrecognised, who is expected to do what to and for whom, and whether children have a voice or representivity in the household. Because children spend a great deal of their time meeting other family members' needs, they are not able to participate on an equal footing, their own needs are often not being met by someone else, and they do not have the time to pursue other activities.

In its vision of citizenship, the political ethics of care incorporates concern with the ability to give and receive care in situations of choice (1997; 1999; 2002). In terms of this idea of citizenship, if we are called upon to care for others, we should be able to do so without forfeiting the right to have our own needs being accommodated, and without having to assume the full burden or responsibility for caregiving ourselves. From the students' accounts, it is clear that female children were particularly vulnerable as their own needs for care were overridden by the call to care for others. Under these circumstances, the space for crucial capabilities (Nussbaum, 1995) was severely curtailed.

Generation was influential in how students and family members were appreciated or unappreciated, in how they were valued or devalued. Seniority, according to students' accounts, entailed respect and authority. Children's positions as family members were influenced by how they were regarded and by family practices which emanated from these perceptions. What emerged from students' accounts is that participatory parity – that is, acting as equals or peers with kin – was rarely achieved for culturally devalued categories such as children. There was neither equal respect for the ascribed attributes to these categories nor were there the opportunities for them to develop themselves so that they could achieve social esteem (Fraser, 1997). From students' accounts, kinds of doing and being, as well as permissible kinds of wants and desires, depended on social categories such as generation. What children as family members could want, say or do was different from what elders could want, say or do. From students' accounts, it was culturally unthinkable for children to desire certain things, for example, to have their needs prioritised above or on a par with more valued adults. The students' accounts also pointed to children's unequal or differential access to household resources and restricted representivity or voice in matters of concern to them.

Using excerpts from students' family portraits, I have illustrated how the concepts of resources, recognition, responsibilities and representivity are useful indicators for judging the conditions for children's well-being and ability to participate on an equal footing with others in a family setting, with due regard to the concrete particulars of their lives. The framework could be similarly applied to children in any context in order to make judgements about how well they are faring in terms of participatory parity, human flourishing and the giving and receiving of care.

Concluding remarks

This special issue is concerned with theorising children's participation, especially in public and political participatory spaces. The model I have proposed is intended both as a comprehensive analytical framework and as a set of normative principles for children's participation in different social spaces, including the political. While participatory parity is the normative ideal, different social arrangements and differences in children's own evolving capacities will determine the extent to which and participatory arenas and relationships in which participatory parity is possible for children.

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(Endnotes)

1. One of the guest editors notes that the approach has similarities with Simon Thompson's (2009) combination of Nancy Fraser's and Axel Honneth's rival theories of recognition as complementary elements in a unitary theory that incorporates normative principles for self-realisation and participatory parity.